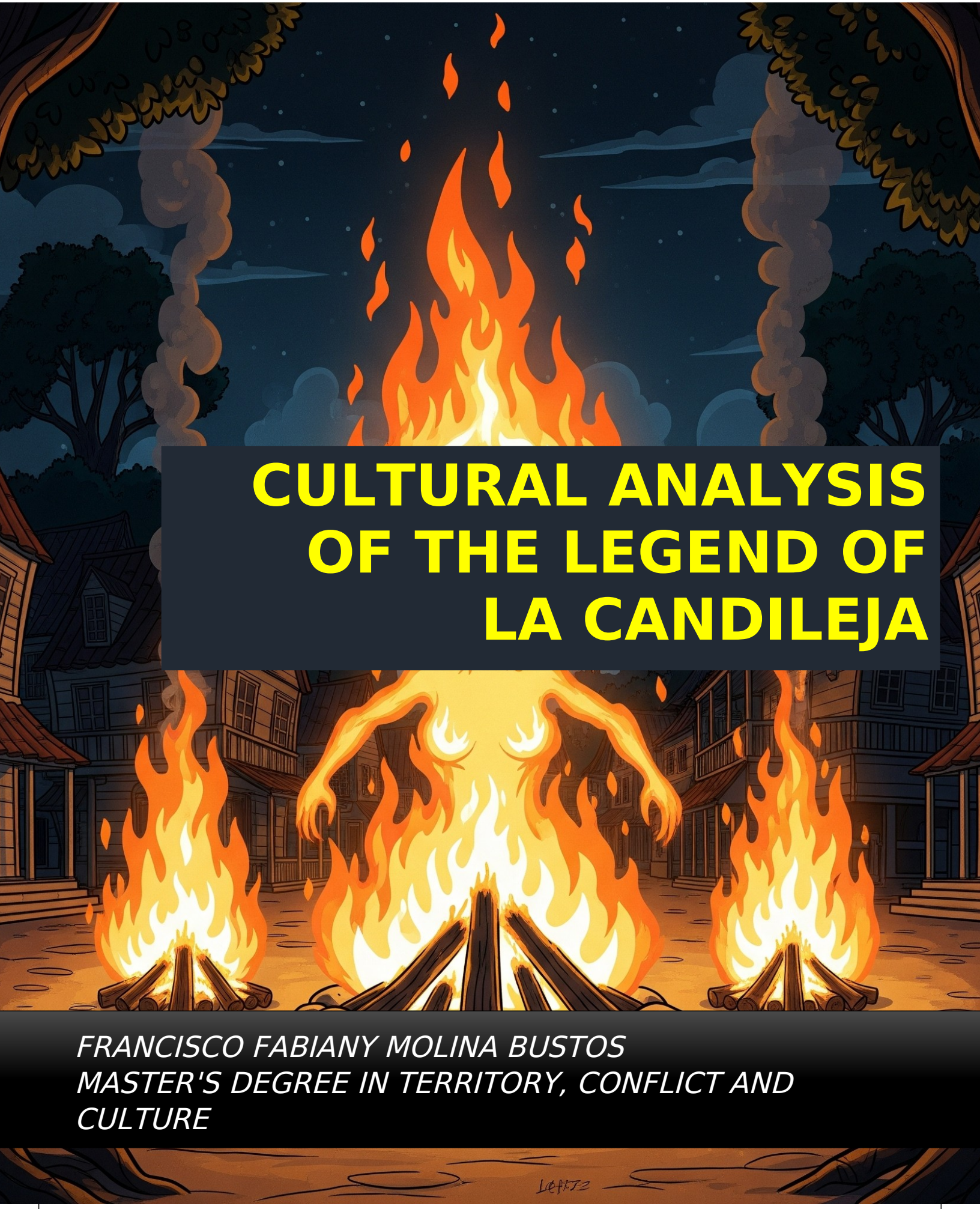

CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE LEGEND OF LA CANDILEJA

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MASTER'S DEGREE IN TERRITORY, CONFLICT AND CULTURE

PREFACE

This academic work is the result of an interdisciplinary reflection on the legend of *La Candileja* , an enigmatic figure of the popular imagination that strongly inhabits the oral memory of southern Colombia, particularly in the departments of Huila and Tolima. From its status as a rural legend that has endured for generations to its ability to adapt to contemporary contexts such as heritage tourism and the cultural economy, *La Candileja* offers itself as an object of multiple and complex analysis, deeply anchored in the symbolic, the affective, and the structural.

The objective of this collection of texts has not been simply to gather descriptive approaches to the myth, but to draw an interpretive map that articulates the different levels at which this figure influences the social fabric. To this end, ritual and ceremonial elements of the legend have been explored with academic rigor, understanding its inscription in celebrations, rites of passage, and symbolic practices of purification or healing that still survive in rural communities. This has made it possible to identify how *La Candileja* , beyond its narrative use, is configured as a functional agent within local cultural systems, allowing for regular social norms, preserving traditions, and, in certain cases, exercising moral control through fear or symbolic warning.

One of the fundamental contributions of this research lies in the examination of the emotional and psychological dimension that the legend mobilizes. Retaking the theory of basic emotions proposed by Robert Plutchik (1980), the affective impact of *La Candileja* has been evaluated , identifying that its figure awakens not only fear, but also respect, nostalgia and a certain form of symbolic admiration, especially within the framework of the memory of female authority. The legend thus functions as a collective emotional catalyst, a device of cultural catharsis that allows communities to process traumas, intergenerational

tensions and shared fears, inserting itself into the theory of myth as a form of collective unconscious expression (Jung, 1969; Eliade, 1963).

The study also critically addresses the way in which *La Candileja* has been incorporated into the symbolic economy and cultural tourism circuits. Following the approaches of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and Néstor García Canclini (2001), it assesses how the figure of the myth is instrumentalized to generate cultural and economic capital through the creation of cultural products (books, festivals, crafts, mythical routes, etc.). In this sense, it proposes a reflection on the ethical limits of the commodification of the sacred, as well as the possibility of sustainable economic exploitation that respects the authenticity of the story without emptying it of meaning.

Oral tales, in their mythical form, condense values, prohibitions, and ethical models that act as symbolic structuring elements of the community fabric. From the structuralist perspective of Lévi-Strauss (1963) and Turner's (1969) proposal of ritual as a mechanism of symbolic transition, *La Candileja has been understood* as a mediating figure between the ancestral past and the processes of cultural modernization experienced by communities. This duality between tradition and adaptation allows the myth to remain relevant, not only in rural oral tradition but also in its presence in schools, social networks, tourist attractions, and even in the production of commercially valuable handcrafted products.

The work also recognizes the disciplining function of myth. *The Candileja* has traditionally been used to warn young people about the dangers of disobedience, impiety, or a debauched lifestyle. In this regard, it is articulated with a psychosocial perspective in which fear is not interpreted as an instrument of oppression, but rather as a mechanism for internalizing cultural norms necessary for coexistence. The legend

thus becomes a pedagogical strategy for transmitting values, which remains in the collective consciousness not only for its emotional charge but also for its practical application.

This preface seeks to frame a research proposal that embraces the mythical not as a remnant of the past, but as a living structure that is constantly reconfigured and redefined. The legend of *La Candileja* allows us to understand how popular cultures find forms of permanence within contemporary systems, how they articulate memory, identity, emotion, ritual, and economy in a single archetypal figure. The exploration of its symbolic, emotional, and economic complexity contributes not only to the field of cultural studies but also to the debate on the place of tradition in postmodern society and the role of culture in the processes of sustainable development and identity in Colombia.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY FUNCTION

Collective Force of Myth

Within the symbolic and narrative framework of Latin American cultures, popular legends play a fundamental role in shaping collective identities, values, and behaviors. The legend of La Candileja, deeply rooted in various regions of Colombia, is a narrative that articulates ancestral fears, social norms, community moralities, and representations of what is permitted and what is sanctioned. From the perspective of symbolic anthropology and Serge Moscovici's (1984) approach to social representations, this myth allows us to understand how societies construct symbolic models to interpret the world and regulate conduct within it. The legend not only conveys values but also regulates community cohesion, functioning as an instrument of symbolic, emotional, and behavioral control.

The Candileja, commonly described as a sphere of fire accompanied by screams or terrifying visions, appears as a punishment for misdeeds, especially parental neglect or juvenile disobedience. This figure operates as a form of symbolic surveillance that imposes limits on behavior. Following Michel Foucault (1975), as social norms are reinforced through oral accounts that structure what is permitted and prohibited, the myth

becomes a technology of disciplinary power that is embedded in the collective imagination. The Candileja does not require formal institutionalization to operate; its existence as a shared relationship is sufficient to exercise a regulatory function.

From a sociological perspective, Émile Durkheim (1912) argued that myths and rituals express and reinforce the collective consciousness. In this sense, the legend of La Candileja functions as a narrative platform to project and reinforce community values, such as respect, obedience, parental responsibility, and reciprocity. By narrating its terroristic effects on those who transgress social norms, the legend becomes a mechanism of socialization, especially among children and adolescents, who learn from an early age to internalize ethical and moral boundaries.

Furthermore, from a semiotic perspective, Roland Barthes (1972) posits that myth transforms the historical into the natural, consolidating a cultural ideology. The figure of the Candileja, when repeated generation after generation, eventually acquires a form of "truth" that guides behavior beyond the empirical veracity of the narrative. This symbolic construction allows the community to channel anxieties, fears, and sanctions into a supernatural figure who, in turn, reinforces the social structure without the need for legal sanctions. The Candileja is not only a monster of folklore; it is also an agent of social normativity.

In rural contexts where access to formal education and state oversight mechanisms may be limited, this legend has historically served a unifying function. According to Colombian anthropologist Guillermo Abadía Morales (1977), traditional stories are a form of popular pedagogy that transmits community wisdom and codes of conduct. La Candileja teaches, warns, and models, operating as an oral social regulatory body. Therefore, its social function goes beyond

entertainment or superstition: it is a cultural tool for preserving moral order.

From the perspective of social psychologist Jerome Bruner (1990), narrative is a mode of thought that organizes human experience and imbues it with meaning. In communities where this legend circulates actively, people not only reproduce the story as a warning, but also integrate its symbolism into their frameworks of meaning. Grandmothers, for example, transmit the myth as an affective warning; they not only seek to frighten, but also to protect. La Candileja thus takes on an affective and pedagogical character, functioning as an expression of intergenerational care through an emotionally charged narrative.

Furthermore, the social function of this legend is articulated with the notion of informal social control, defined by Edwin Lemert (1951), where norms are internalized and reinforced through social pressure, fear, and a sense of belonging. The legend of La Candileja becomes a self-control device: individuals regulate themselves out of fear of the figure's appearance, and this fear is shared within the network, consolidating a vigilant community structure.

The narrative is also adaptive: it has evolved to include current issues such as drug addiction, domestic violence, and the abandonment of the elderly, transforming its message according to contemporary tensions. This dynamism reinforces its permanence as a functional link to community cohesion, demonstrating a capacity for symbolic renewal that allows it to survive as a living myth.

In short, the legend of La Candileja functions as a powerful organizer of values and norms in Colombian community life. Its symbolic, emotional, and narrative richness allows it to transcend generations, social classes,

and territories. Far from being a simple horror story, it stands as an instrument of socialization, cohesion, and social regulation. Within rural and urban communities, the fiery figure of La Candileja continues to fulfill its function: making the invisible visible, alerting the unspeakable, and reminding, through fire, that individual actions have collective consequences. Through this relationship, the community finds a way to project its tensions, protect its values, and strengthen its shared social identity.

Limelight as Moral Pedagogy

Within the corpus of Colombian popular legends, La Candileja stands out as a figure with a strong normative, pedagogical, and symbolic charge. Far from being a simple manifestation of rural folklore, its narrative structure and oral persistence make it an instrument of moral teaching, social warning, and behavioral regulation. Through its frightening character and its roots in collective imagination, this legend operates as a mechanism for transmitting community values. As Bronislaw Malinowski (1926) points out, myths and legends are not mere archaic fantasies, but functional expressions of cultural norms. In this sense, La Candileja is a pedagogical tool that educates in virtue, punishes vice, and promotes social cohesion through fear and metaphor.

Traditionally, legend tells the story of a grandmother who, for having overindulged her grandchildren and allowed them all kinds of freedoms, dies and is condemned to wander like a ball of fire. Her eternal damnation is a punishment not only for negligence, but also for failing to correct and educate in values. From an Aristotelian ethical reading, we could interpret this story as a call to moderation and virtue. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (2009), defines virtue as the just medium between two extremes, and emphasizes the role of moral formation through the repetition of virtuous acts. The Footlight, by symbolizing the

punishment for permissive excesses and the lack of temperance in education, reinforces the need to guide young people on the path of practical virtue (*phronesis).*) within a good life (*eudaimonia*).

From a deontological perspective, Immanuel Kant (1785) considered the myth as an expression of an unfulfilled moral duty. The grandmother transgresses the categorical imperative by failing to act according to a maxim that could be universalized: failure to correct her grandchildren's behavior leads to negative consequences for them and for society. The legend, by presenting a figure condemned for abandoning their ethical duty, teaches that individual acts have not only personal but also collective consequences. The myth thus operates as a narrative that reinforces the need for duty for duty's sake, establishing a normative framework that can be internalized even from childhood.

From the utilitarian ethics of Jeremy Bentham (1789) and John Stuart Mill (1863), the Limelight can be interpreted as a narrative instrument designed to maximize collective well-being. By instilling fear about the dangers of bad behavior and negligent parenting, the myth seeks to avoid future suffering—real or symbolic—among community members. The threat implicit in the legend generates a preventive effect, causing adults to act more responsibly and young people to obey the rules. Thus, although the emotional resource is fear, its objective is the well-being of the greatest number of people, which gives it significant social utility.

Stoic thought also offers a profound interpretation of this legend. Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, for example, advocated a life guided by reason, self-control, and acceptance of fate. The figure of the Footlight represents a warning against the excesses of emotion—in this case, excessive love that turns into destructive permissiveness—and the lack of inner control. The grandmother's tragedy lies not in external punishment, but in the loss of internal harmony and her inability to act

according to reason. From this perspective, the myth teaches us the importance of self-discipline and the control of passions, core values of Stoic thought that remain relevant in contemporary societies experiencing ethical crisis.

From the field of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire (1970) has pointed out that every educational act is also a political act. Along these lines, legends such as La Candileja convey a worldview charged with moral intent, where not only individual norms are taught, but also collective structures of power, obedience, and respect. The community uses the story to form subjectivities in accordance with its moral and social needs. In rural and peripheral contexts where institutional access to education may be limited, this legend plays a crucial role as a non-formal means of ethical learning.

Beyond its regulatory function, La Candileja also provides a platform for the construction of cultural identity. Following Stuart Hall (1990), oral stories like this one not only reaffirm values but also constitute spaces in which communities recognize, explain, and symbolically reproduce themselves. In each telling of the myth, a community pedagogy is revived that does not rely on scientific rationalization, but rather on the affective power of the story, the gesture of the old man who tells the story, the silence of the child who listens, and the fear that remains as a warning.

Plutchik 's (2001) theory of emotions . The fear that The Limelight arouses is related to its adaptive function: it prepares the individual to avoid danger (real or symbolic) and promotes self-preservation behaviors. The emotion is not presented as a pathology, but rather as a catalyst for learning and decision-making. Thus, the legend elicits an intentional emotional response, which helps internalize cultural and moral norms through the sensory experience of the story.

In short, the legend of La Candileja has established itself as a complex tool for teaching and moralizing within the Colombian social fabric. Through a narrative charged with symbolism and emotion, it successfully engages individuals on ethical, emotional, and rational levels. Transmitted in intimate, familial, and community settings, this legend not only preserves a cultural tradition but also educates, warns, and guides. In its wandering fire and eternal condemnation, ancestral lessons resonate that remain relevant today: virtue requires guidance, duty demands action, collective well-being depends on self-care and emotional balance, and every act carries moral weight in shared life. In the figure of La Candileja, the past and the present intertwine to construct the ethical meaning of humanity.

ORAL TRANSMISSION AND GENERAL CONTINUITY

Cultural Heritage and Limelight

Within the broad panorama of Colombian popular legends, *La Candileja* stands out as a symbol that condenses moral tensions, cultural values, and social norms transmitted through generations. This figure of national folklore—represented combined as a ball of fire that pursues those who transgress family and community norms—serves a much deeper function than that of a simple terrifying tale. Its persistence in popular oral tradition, especially in rural and peasant-style regions, responds to a social need to structure and maintain collective codes of behavior. This study proposes an analysis of the social functionality of *La Candileja* , assessing its role as a corrective myth, a shaper of identity, and a preserver of communal norms, based on theoretical categories of cultural symbolism, the anthropology of myth, and functionalist sociology.

From a structuralist perspective, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964) argued that myths function as forms of collective thought, codifying fundamental oppositions in society. *The Limelight* fits into this logic, as its narrative structure contrasts familial respect with negligence, obedience with disobedience, and community duty with individual selfishness. It is said that *the Limelight* was a permissive grandmother who failed to correct

her grandchildren and was condemned to wander eternally as a wandering fire. The figure burns not only for her personal transgression, but as a reminder of what happens when moral education fails. Thus, the myth contains a clear normative function: to prevent the abandonment of educational authority in the family environment.

Mircea Eliade (1957) argues that myths allow societies to reaffirm exemplary models of behavior. In this sense, *The Limelight* represents the opposite of this model, but its function is to reinforce the ideal through punishment. Its fire is not only literal but symbolic: it consumes those who neglect fundamental moral obligations. The myth serves as a warning and, at the same time, as a pedagogical affirmation that the parental or family role should not be neglected. In this way, *The Limelight* acts as an instrument for reproducing a communal ethic of shared responsibility in parenting and coexistence.

In terms of social functionalism, Bronislaw Malinowski (1948) explains that myths serve practical functions by legitimizing institutions and behaviors. In rural areas of Colombia, where family and neighborhood networks are fundamental to daily survival, legends such as *La Candileja* are embedded in a symbolic order that reinforces cohesion. The story told around the hearth or at wakes serves as a mechanism for early socialization, constantly reminding people of right and wrong, without the need to resort to formal texts or external authorities. The fear the story evokes is not irrational: it is linked to the fear of the disintegration of the family fabric and the loss of social control.

Clifford Geertz's (1973) symbolic-interpretive approach also provides an understanding of how *La Candileja* functions as a vehicle for cultural meaning. The myth not only conveys norms but also helps define what it means to "be part of a community." Through the fear of being chased by the fireball, it teaches the importance of acting as expected by the

community. The legend codifies a rural identity based on respect for elders, the defense of family unity, and collective behavioral vigilance. In this sense, *La Candileja* is not simply a story, but a framework through which to interpret and evaluate the behavior of others and oneself.

From a social psychology perspective, authors such as Serge Moscovici (1981) assert that social representations allow for the stabilization of collective thinking in the face of diffuse threats. *The Footlight* fulfills this function: it is an archetypal image of the chaos that results from neglecting community ties. As a representation, it operates both at the individual level—conditioning behavior from childhood—and at the collective level—constantly reminding us of the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Furthermore, in a context where formal law often fails to reach, myth acts as a symbolic law that allows for self-control and the internal regulation of social relations.

It is important to note that this legend has endured not only because of its moral weight, but also because of its adaptability. In some modern accounts, *La Candileja* persecutes those who mistreat the elderly or break family ties. In others, it punishes the corrupt or those who desecrate the natural environment, which demonstrates its symbolic flexibility. This adaptability allows it to remain relevant as a channel for contemporary social tensions, constantly reconfiguring its meanings without losing its central function: monitoring the limits of what is permitted within the community.

Likewise, from the perspective of Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, the myth can be seen as an informal but profoundly transformative act of teaching. Through a simple and emotionally powerful narrative, *La Candileja* provokes awareness about the consequences of emotional and social neglect. The informal education that emerges from the story aims to develop an ethical subject, rooted in values such as solidarity,

respect, and shared responsibility. The myth, then, educates outside the classroom, but with profound effects on individual and collective subjectivity.

Furthermore, it is important to understand this legend within the context of rural Latin American oral tradition, where—as Walter Ong (1982) points out—collective memory is constructed from living stories that circulate and transform over time. *La Candileja* is not a fixed text, but rather a narrative matrix activated in specific contexts, such as childrearing, parental admonitions, or social rituals. Its power lies precisely in its ability to be told, remembered, and feared, without the need for institutionalization. It is intangible heritage, yet profoundly effective as a mechanism for transmitting norms.

In short, *La Candileja* not only survives as a picturesque folkloric figure, but also fulfills profound functions of integration and social control. Symbolic, psychological, and pedagogical elements converge within it, allowing communities to maintain their cohesion, define their identity, and transmit their essential values. The myth becomes a code for interpreting social reality, an instrument of moral teaching, and a constant reminder of community duty. Reflecting on *La Candileja* is to recognize that myths do not belong solely to the past: they live on in culture because they continue to fulfill vital functions. By fearing it, one does not fear fire, but rather the forgetting of that which keeps us united as a society.

Limelight as a moral guide

In Colombian oral tradition, the legend of *La Candileja* represents much more than a scary story passed down from generation to generation. Its narrative structure, symbolism, and permanence in the collective imagination make it a powerful tool for teaching, warning, and

moralizing, especially in rural communities where oral stories are a fundamental pillar of sociocultural development. This analysis addresses the social and community function of the myth from multiple theoretical frameworks, with an emphasis on its normative and educational role, as well as from diverse ethical conceptions that allow us to delve deeper into its moral significance.

The legend of *La Candileja* tells the story of an indulgent grandmother who, for failing to correct her grandchildren and allowing their moral corruption, is condemned to wander eternally as a ball of fire, harassing those who stray from the righteous path. This tale, beyond its supernatural content, operates as an informal system of community pedagogy. According to Bronislaw Malinowski (1948), myths in traditional societies not only explain the world but also educate, legitimizing values and social structures. In this case, *La Candileja* becomes a mechanism that reinforces the importance of familial moral control and intergenerational responsibility, especially in parenting.

In the thought of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964), myth functions as a way to resolve fundamental binary oppositions in society. *The Footlight* presents a tension between duty and negligence, between punishment and permissiveness, and between order and chaos. Its nocturnal appearance and punitive nature construct a symbolic system that discourages antisocial behavior, such as disrespect for elders, family irresponsibility, or the abandonment of community values. In contexts where formal institutions are weak or distant, myth offers ethical regulation based on symbolic fear.

From the perspective of Aristotelian ethics, the story fulfills a didactic function that refers to the formation of moral character through habit and emotional experience. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* , argues that virtue is achieved through the continuous practice of moral acts

guided by reason and balance. *The Footlight* , by depicting the consequences of a life without moderation or responsibility, teaches the need to cultivate temperance and prudence. It is not the threat that educates, but the idea that every action has a consequence on the soul and the community. The narrative, by dramatizing the price of moral indifference, induces a reflection on human excellence (*areté*) in the family and social sphere.

In line with this reading, Kantian ethics reinforces the normative dimension of the myth. For Immanuel Kant, in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), morality does not depend on results, but on duty: acting according to principles that can be universalized. *The Footlight* symbolizes what happens when the categorical imperative to educate others—in this case, one's descendants—in respect and responsibility is betrayed. The figure of the punished grandmother conveys not only personal guilt, but also the echo of an unforgivable omission within the framework of moral duty. Thus, the myth embodies an ethic of obligation, where inaction translates into condemnation, not for its effects, but for its inconsistency with an inescapable duty.

From a utilitarian perspective, myth can be analyzed as a device that maximizes collective well-being by preventing moral and social suffering. Jeremy Bentham (1789) and John Stuart Mill (1863), the main exponents of utilitarianism, advocated that moral action is that which produces the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people. In this sense, *The Limelight* fulfills a deterrent function: by generating fear of dysfunctional behavior, it protects family cohesion, reduces intergenerational conflict, and reinforces practices that favor social stability. The fear it provokes is not an end in itself, but a means to avoid the loss of values that ensure community harmony.

Along a different, though complementary, line, Stoicism offers an interpretation centered on self-control, inner duty, and acceptance of the natural consequences of our actions. Philosophers such as Epictetus and Seneca defended the idea that virtue consists in living according to reason and nature, cultivating discipline and a sense of duty. From this perspective, *the Footlight* can be seen as a representation of internal disorder projected onto the external world. Its wandering fire embodies the uncontrolled passions that, when left unchecked, consume not only those who harbor them but also those around them. Thus, the myth functions as a warning against the exposure of soul and character, the degeneration of which ultimately devours the community that allows it.

The role of myth as a tool for moralizing is also reinforced by Serge Moscovici's theory of social representations (1981), for whom shared stories allow for the structuring of collective thinking, stabilizing norms and meanings. *The Candileja* acts as a symbolic boundary between good and evil, between responsibility and abandonment. In rural Colombian contexts, where these legends are still transmitted, storytelling occupies a privileged place as a strategy for the moral formation of children and young people. Its effectiveness lies not only in its content, but in the very act of telling it, of constantly updating it as an educational ritual.

Furthermore, from a cultural anthropological perspective, Mary Douglas (1966) asserts that symbols of impurity or punishment, such as *the Footlight* , represent a threatened order, the restoration of which requires the reaffirmation of limits. In this logic, the fiery figure that punishes becomes a moral threshold that delimits what is permissible. It is through the reiteration of these myths that communities reaffirm what they consider acceptable, shaping a collective imagination that resists oblivion.

The effectiveness of *La Candileja* as a teaching mechanism is also explained by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970), who argued that the deepest learning occurs when experience is articulated with reflection. The story not only terrifies, but also invites us to consider the responsibility to educate, to correct, and to transmit values. By presenting it in an accessible symbolic language, the legend breaks down academic or institutional barriers and becomes a living pedagogical resource at work in everyday life.

The permanence of *La Candileja* in Colombian popular culture cannot be understood solely as a folkloric curiosity. Its relevance stems from its ability to mediate between fear and ethics, between the supernatural and the normative, between the oral past and the symbolic present. The myth teaches without classrooms, moralizes without laws, and warns without the need for written codes. Its burning flame recalls not only the fields and mountains, but also the memories, fears, and moral aspirations of those who tell it. Observing the legend from diverse ethical frameworks—Aristotelian, Kantian, utilitarian, and Stoic—reveals the profound impact it can have on character development, the awareness of duty, and the pursuit of the common good. In *La Candileja* , culture has constructed a moral guide wrapped in fire, whose light—though feared—still provides direction.

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION

Intergenerational Living Relationship

Within the vast wealth of Colombian folklore, the legend of *La Candileja* represents an emblematic case of narrative persistence within the symbolic framework of popular culture. This mythical figure—a ball of fire that punishes those who have failed in their moral duties, especially within the family—continues to circulate in the collective imagination, particularly in rural settings. The transmission of this legend is not solely due to its aesthetic or narrative value, but also to its ability to remain relevant as an intergenerational cultural device. In this sense, this analysis investigates the function of *La Candileja* from the perspective of oral transmission, evaluating its generational continuity as a myth that articulates memory, identity, and normativity.

The central question guiding this reflection is whether *"La Candileja" (* The Limelight) continues to be told from generation to generation and, if so, what factors have enabled its survival. Within the theoretical framework of cultural transmission, authors such as Edward B. Tylor (1871) and Alfred Kroeber (1917) point out that culture is inherited socially, not biologically, through mechanisms of learning and repetition. Thus, legends and myths are part of the symbolic content that societies reproduce to preserve mental structures, social norms, and worldviews.

In this process, oral tradition becomes the fundamental tool for communicating the past and projecting it into the present.

Walter Ong (1982), when addressing orality as a form of knowledge, highlighted that oral cultures depend on memorable, repetitive, and emotion-laden narratives. *La Candileja* , as an oral myth, fulfills these characteristics: it has a simple but intense structure, generates fear and reflection, and is linked to a clear moral context. Mothers, grandparents, and caregivers transmit the story as a warning, lesson, and entertainment, contributing to the reproduction of local culture. This continuity is reinforced by the ritual nature of the story: it is told at night, at family or community gatherings, in contexts that facilitate the internalization of the message.

From the perspective of Jack Goody (1986), who differentiated between oral and written culture, oral transmission tends to be based on repetitive patterns that ensure memorization, but also contextual adaptation. *The Limelight* is not a fixed story: its content transforms according to the problems of each generation. In ancient times, it represented punishment for maternal neglect; in recent versions, it persecutes those who mistreat grandparents, destroy nature, or abandon the family. This capacity for dynamic transformation explains its longevity: the myth is not static, but a living narrative structure that adapts to new forms of social understanding.

The intergenerational transmission of *La Candileja* can also be analyzed from the perspective of the theory of collective memory developed by Maurice Halbwachs (1950), who argued that collective memories are maintained through social frameworks that allow for their preservation. In this case, the legend acts as a cultural resource that anchors individual experiences in a historical and community context. By hearing or telling the story, the subject not only relives a tale but is also inserted

into a symbolic genealogy that grants it belonging and meaning. The continuity of the myth, therefore, is also an act of identity reaffirmation.

Along the same lines, Jan Assmann (1992) distinguished between communicative memory and cultural memory. While the former encompasses memories transmitted within the family in the short term, the latter includes elements that are culturally institutionalized and endure for centuries. *La Candileja* transits between both planes: it is transmitted in everyday conversations, but is also part of the cultural repertoire that defines rural Colombia. Its appearance in school stories, artistic productions, and repertoires of popular festivals demonstrates that its transmission no longer depends exclusively on the domestic sphere, but has found other platforms for circulation.

On the other hand, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theory of cultural reproduction allows us to interpret how certain narratives survive due to their coherence with dominant social structures. *La Candileja* reproduces a vision of the moral order based on generational hierarchy, family duty, and community vigilance. These structures, still in force in many areas of the country, reinforce the symbolic value of the myth, turning it into an effective tool for naturalizing roles and responsibilities. The transmission of the story is not only an act of entertainment, but a socialization mechanism that reinforces shared habits.

In psychological and sociocultural terms, Jerome Bruner (1990) suggests that human beings construct their identity through narratives. Telling and hearing the legend of *La Candileja* contributes to this construction, as it organizes individual experience around cultural patterns that teach what should be feared, respected, or avoided. Thus, the intergenerational transmission of the myth not only preserves its content but also shapes the listener's subjectivity, particularly during childhood, when the stories shape the initial ethical framework.

From the symbolic anthropology of Clifford Geertz (1973), it can be stated that the legend serves as both a "model of" and a "model for" reality. It is both a "model of" a society that values intergenerational responsibility and obedience to community norms, and a "model for" behavior, as it guides future practices by exemplifying negative consequences. The act of telling the myth is, therefore, an act of symbolic reproduction of the social order.

The contemporary perception of *La Candileja* reveals a hybridization between the traditional and the modern. Although urbanization, schooling, and access to digital media have displaced many forms of oral tradition, the legend lives on in new narratives, such as animations, literary adaptations, memes, and even video games with folklore themes. This transposition doesn't eliminate its cultural significance, but rather redefines it for new audiences. The transition from hearth-based storytelling to digital storytelling doesn't imply a loss of meaning, but rather a transformation of the transmission medium.

Finally, from a broader perspective of cultural transmission, Dan Sperber (1985) argued that cultural ideas spread successfully when they are memorable, emotionally impactful, and adaptable. *La Candileja* meets these conditions. Its fiery figure, exemplary condemnation, and ability to fit into different social and moral contexts make it especially resistant to oblivion. Its transmission is not achieved solely by tradition, but by its narrative and symbolic effectiveness in expressing the dilemmas of human behavior in the face of group demands.

The legend of *La Candileja* remains alive in Colombian oral memory because it fulfills social, symbolic, and pedagogical functions that go beyond the mere narrative of the fantastic. It adapts, transforms, and resists silence. Its generational continuity is proof that oral tradition is not an obsolete form of communication, but a sophisticated cultural

technology that articulates knowledge, emotion, and belonging. When *La Candileja is told* , it's not just a story that is revived: it reaffirms bonds, updates values, and projects a worldview where memory remains a form of guidance. The power of this legend lies in its ability to persist not as an echo of the past, but as an active voice that still finds ears willing to listen.

Limelight in new formats

The legend of *La Candileja* , traditionally transmitted orally in rural areas of Colombia, has endured over time not only due to its symbolic force and its functionality as a moralizing tale, but also due to its remarkable capacity to adapt to new cultural formats. Its insertion into contemporary media such as literature, cinema, digital animation and social networks allows us to understand the complex dynamics of cultural transmission in contexts of technological change and social reconfiguration. In this sense, the present analysis examines the generational continuity of the myth since its transition from oral to audiovisual and digital format, supported by theories on cultural transmission and from a critical perspective of social capital, particularly within the framework of David Harvey's (2005) thought on dispossession and the reconfiguration of popular imaginaries.

In its traditional form, *La Candileja* circulates as a moral warning that prevents intergenerational neglect, associated with the punishment of a grandmother who , for excessively pampering her grandchildren, ends up condemned to wander in the form of fire. This story fulfills normative, social, and pedagogical functions in peasant culture, reproduced mainly through oral tradition. However, as Jan Assmann (1992) points out, cultural memory is not confined to the story's original format, but is reconfigured through new communication technologies that allow its insertion into contemporary symbolic frameworks. Thus, *La Candileja*

has been reworked in illustrated stories, television series, TikTok content , independent films, narrative games, and graphic adaptations, without entirely losing its original meaning, although redefining its symbols for urban, young, or digital audiences.

This phenomenon is explained from the perspective of cultural transmission as a nonlinear, adaptive, and contextual process. As Dan Sperber (1985) suggests, successful cultural representations are those that can be modified without losing coherence, facilitating their replication in multiple contexts. *The Limelight* , as a symbol charged with emotion, fear, and learning, meets these conditions, so it is not surprising that it continues to be replicated in new visual, audio, and textual forms that reinforce or subvert its traditional meanings.

In the literary field, contemporary authors have incorporated the figure of *La Candileja* as an allegorical character in horror novels and short stories, either maintaining its rural essence or inserting it into urban landscapes, where it appears as a metaphor for the punishment of indifference, domestic violence, or ethical evaluation. These reinterpretations reflect what Clifford Geertz (1973) calls the symbolically dense nature of cultural relations, capable of condensing multiple meanings into a single image. In Colombian cinema, although still marginal, there are explorations that link this figure with the Andean Gothic universe, fusing the ancestral with the contemporary to engage new audiences from a perspective of social critique and memory.

Social media has played a crucial role in this reconfiguration. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have hosted short narratives in which *La Candileja* reappears as a digital avatar, an animated character, or as an educational resource in cultural outreach content. This technological mediation allows story elements to be fragmented and rearticulated into new narrative sequences that, although brief or

humorous, continue to serve the function of symbolic circulation. As Henry Jenkins (2006) argues in his theory of cultural convergence, stories migrate between platforms and formats, generating transmedia narratives that amplify their impact and social reach.

However, this transition also entails tensions, especially in contexts marked by the loss of communal social capital. David Harvey (2005), analyzing the phenomenon of dispossession by accumulation, warns that traditional symbolic forms are often dismantled or reconfigured by market logic and spectacularization . In this context, *La Candileja* can be seen as an expression of dispossessed social capital: to the extent that its relationship ceases to belong exclusively to collective peasant knowledge and begins to circulate as commercial content, it loses part of its moralizing force and its cohesive function. What previously operated as a warning transmitted between generations now runs the risk of becoming an aesthetic commodity that strips communities of their narrative rights and their memory referents.

This perspective is especially relevant in contexts of displacement, forced urbanization, and the loss of ancestral territories, where the destruction of the community fabric has disrupted traditional channels of oral transmission. As Pierre Bourdieu (1986) points out, social capital manifests itself in networks of trust and reciprocity; in the case of the legend, its oral transmission was an act of intergenerational trust. When this fabric is disrupted, the myth may persist, but stripped of its original contexts of meaning.

However, not everything in this transformation implies loss. From a more integrative perspective, Jack Goody (1987) warns that oral stories, when they come into contact with writing and digital media, do not disappear, but rather mutate and gain new layers of meaning. Thus, *La Candileja* can function as a bridge between generations, even in contexts of

migration and cultural diaspora. Its presence in school media, in oral heritage recovery projects, in educational animations, or in digital art exhibitions suggests a redefinition that combines tradition and modernity.

This transition also raises questions from the fields of memory and cultural identity. Paul Ricoeur (2000) argued that storytelling is an act of identity, as it shapes the time and meaning of lived experience. In this context, the reappearance of *La Candileja* in digital formats can be read as a form of symbolic resistance that recovers fragments of an eroded community memory. The story not only continues but is updated as a way of challenging new generations about the importance of not forgetting emotional ties, the consequences of moral neglect, and the need to maintain social bonds.

Faced with these dynamics, the legend can be understood as what Jan Assmann (2011) calls a "far-reaching cultural form," capable of persisting not because of its literal form, but because of its ability to adapt to different communicative frameworks without losing its symbolic core. The fire that embodies *La Candileja* continues to burn, although now it does so on screens, books, or podcasts, showing that myths don't die: they transform.

In short, the legend of *La Candileja* has demonstrated remarkable adaptability in the face of technological and cultural change. Its transition from oral tradition to new formats such as film, literature, and social media reveals both its narrative power and its fragility in the face of processes of symbolic dispossession. Theories of cultural transmission show how this figure is redefined without losing its moralizing core, while the analysis of dispossessed social capital warns of the risks of disconnection between relationship and community. However, its relevance in digital contexts also allows us to consider renewed forms of

collective memory, where the myth remains a channel for symbolic formation, albeit under new conditions of circulation. In this fire, which changes form but not meaning, lies a profound key to how cultures resist, remember, and reinvent themselves.

TERRITORIAL AND GEOGRAPHIC IDENTITY

Symbols in Colombian Candileja

The legend of *La Candileja* , deeply rooted in Colombian oral tradition, especially in rural contexts in the center and south of the country, represents a narrative that, beyond its folkloric character, fulfills social, educational and moral functions through a complex symbolic structure. Over time, this myth has survived through oral transmission and has remained current thanks to its semiotic richness and its potential to structure social representations. This text proposes to analyze the symbolic elements present in the legend of *La Candileja* , evaluating its role within the Colombian cultural framework and understanding its meaning from the perspective of semiotic theory and social representations, especially based on the approaches of Charles Sanders Peirce and Serge Moscovici.

The basic narrative of *La Candileja* tells the story of an old woman who was punished for being overly permissive with her grandchildren, allowing their moral degeneration. As divine punishment, her wandering spirit manifests as a ball of fire with three human heads engulfed in flames, often associated with plaintive screams and nighttime chases. This central image is laden with symbolic elements whose analysis

allows us to understand the cultural depth of the story and its structuring function in community morality.

From a semiotic perspective, Charles S. Peirce (1903) defines a sign as something that represents something to someone in a certain form. In *The Limelight* , fire becomes a **naturalized symbol** of purification, condemnation, and vigilance. The fireball is not only a visual phenomenon feared by the peasants; it represents the moral action of the community and divine retribution for the negligence in the education of the new generations. In this context, fire acts as an **icon** (due to its similarity to infernal punishment), as **an index** (because it indicates the presence of a transgression), and as **a symbol** (because it has become synonymous with moral warning).

Another recurring symbolic element in the legend is the **screams** , **wails** , or **heart-rending voices** that accompany the appearance of the flaming figure. These sounds not only reinforce the terrifying component of the myth but also function as **auditory symbols** of guilt, remorse, and eternal suffering. In semiotic terms, these sensory components provoke an emotional reaction that strengthens the memorization of the story and the effectiveness of its cultural transmission. Through fear, the community internalizes norms of behavior, reinforcing an unwritten moral code.

In addition to fire and sound, the geographical space associated with *La Candileja* has a strong symbolic charge. It is said to appear in **rural areas, lonely roads, mountains, or rivers** , which turns the territory into a symbolic setting for the marginal and the morally ambiguous. According to Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), spaces acquire meaning through cultural experience. In this sense, the places where *La Candileja manifests* are transformed into **mythologized spaces** where the supernatural serves

to reconfigure the everyday, turning the rural into the quintessential setting for indirect moral teaching.

This link between symbol, relationship and territory is articulated with what Serge Moscovici (1981) conceptualized as **social representations** , understood as socially elaborated and shared forms of knowledge that allow us to interpret reality and guide behavior. In the case of *La Candileja* , the community interprets its presence as punishment and warning; the myth then becomes a social representation that naturalizes parenting norms, intergenerational roles and acceptable behaviors. Moscovici emphasizes that these representations are not passive, but active: *La Candileja* functions as a mechanism that shapes attitudes, especially in the youngest, in whom it tries to instill respect for authority, family duty and traditional values.

Likewise, *La Candileja* incorporates **deformed or monstrous human figures** , such as the old woman with multiple heads or limbs, elements that correspond to the archetype of the grotesque. As Mikhail Bakhtin (1965) analyzed, the grotesque operates as an inversion of order, an overflow and symbolic punishment of the social body. The monstrous body in *La Candileja* symbolizes moral disorder, projected onto a deformed corporal figure that expresses, visually and narratively, the collapse of the community's fundamental values.

In some versions of the myth, fire takes animal form: there is talk of **fire dogs** , **fiery birds** or **burning snakes** that accompany or are part of the phenomenon. These animals, common in the rural imagination, become **allegories of punishment** , with both religious and pagan resonances. The presence of fantastic animals in the myth reinforces its universal and archetypal character, connecting with what Carl Gustav Jung (1958) called **symbols of the collective unconscious** :

primordial forms that appear in different cultures as an expression of common drives.

From an anthropological perspective, Mary Douglas (1966) asserted that symbolic systems express social boundaries, and that elements considered "out of place" are those that threaten group cohesion. *The Footlight* , as a liminal symbol, appears at the edges—geographical, moral, and temporal—to signal what should not be done, reinforcing the normative limits of the community. Its presence on rural roads at dusk reminds the walker that he is not only crossing a physical space, but a moral threshold.

A semiotic analysis of this legend allows us to observe how a series of symbols—fire, screams, deformities, animals, and spaces—are articulated to construct a complex symbolic universe that operates effectively within the communities where it is narrated. Each symbol contributes to the structure of the myth as a mechanism of warning, correction, and reproduction of values. These elements, taken together, transform *La Candileja* into a narrative system that educates through fear and establishes cultural imaginaries through its sensorial, emotional, and symbolic impact.

The polysemic nature of the symbols contained in the legend allows their interpretations to vary according to the sociocultural and generational context. However, their symbolic core remains stable: fire as judgment, lament as warning, the monster as a representation of excess and disobedience, and the territory as the ritual setting for punishment. These signs, in their articulation, construct a collective memory that continues to shape perceptions about desired behavior and the limits of what is acceptable.

Recovering the symbolic meaning of *La Candileja* in the present does not only imply a nostalgic look at the rural past, but also the possibility of recognizing how myths organize collective thought and structure social representations that are still current. From a semiotic perspective, the layers of meaning that make the myth an effective narrative become evident, capable of codifying rules and warnings without the need for formal structures. Moscovici's approach understands how these symbols configure frameworks of social interpretation that remain active in everyday decisions, parenting practices, and family relationships. Thus, *La Candileja* is not only a memory of yesterday, but a symbolic matrix that continues to shape the Colombian moral imaginary, adapting and persisting thanks to the power of its symbols.

Fire and mythical morality

The legend of *La Candileja* is part of the Colombian cultural fabric in rural areas, where oral tradition and the collective imagination merge to convey moral warnings, consolidate identities, and preserve symbolic structures with profound ethical and cultural content. This mythical figure—generally described as a burning ball of fire with human figures engulfed in flames—represents a vivid allegory of punishment for permissiveness and the deviance of family duty. Through its iconography and narrative persistence, *La Candileja* operates as a complex symbolic system whose philosophical, ethical, and anthropological roots can be traced from Platonic archetypes to the Aristotelian foundations of virtue.

In its most widespread form, *La Candileja* is narrated as the spirit of a grandmother who, having overindulged her grandchildren and allowed them to stray from the moral path, is condemned after her death to wander in the form of fire, chasing those who walk alone at night with terrifying screams. This representation incorporates various symbolic

elements that, when read from a philosophical and semiotic perspective, reveal implicit moral structures that reinforce the rural social fabric.

Fire , the most obvious and omnipresent symbol in the legend, has multiple meanings simultaneously. In Western tradition, fire is ambivalent: it can be light and wisdom—as in the myth of Prometheus or Plato's allegory of the cave—or punishment and purification—as in Christian accounts of Hell. In **The** *Footlights* , fire acts as a symbol of transcendent justice, evoking the Platonic archetype of the Good, which, when diverted, generates imbalance and demands restitution. According to Plato, archetypes or *eide* They are ideal models that sensory realities approximate. The figure of the punished old woman embodies the deviation from the archetype of the wise and protective grandmother: its deformation produces imbalance, and fire appears as a symbolic restorer of the altered moral order.

Aristotle, for his part, points out that the virtuous man is the one who acts in accordance with *phronesis* (practical wisdom), avoiding excesses and defects through the golden mean. *The Footlight* embodies the punishment for the lack of prudence and restraint in parenting, reminding listeners of the importance of moral balance in family relationships. The representation of the burning figure not only punishes error, but also transforms it into a warning: it teaches through fear, illustrating how the transgression of the natural and moral order leads to tragic consequences.

Beside the fire, the **heart-rending scream** that accompanies *The Limelight* is another essential symbol. It is a sonic symbol that dramatizes eternal suffering, functioning as an echo of belated repentance. This element is closely related to the Aristotelian concept of *pathos* , which activates emotions to facilitate moral teaching. The pain emanating from the scream is not merely narrative; it is pedagogical: it

is intended to move the listener to warn them about the risks of ethical neglect.

The story also features **deformed bodily forms** , such as multiple faces, glowing eyes, or amorphous bodies amidst flames. These images respond to a moral archetype of bodily disorder as a reflection of inner disorder, a connection clearly established in Greek philosophy. For the Greeks, the beauty and harmony of the body were a reflection of the virtuous soul; the grotesque, on the other hand, denounced moral imbalance. *The Footlight* displays the body of vice, of excess, of maternal error, as a body of overflowing fire, without form or direction.

The **territory in which** *La Candileja* manifests itself also has particular symbolic significance: rural roads, mountains, rivers, or forested areas. These are liminal spaces, far from civilization, where everyday rules are suspended and the threshold toward the mythical opens. In mythological tradition, the forest is an archetypal symbol of the unconscious and moral danger; there the hero is lost and can find revelations or punishments. *La Candileja* inhabits these territories precisely because they represent uncertainty, that which is beyond human control, the place of punishment and learning.

On the other hand, considering **animal elements** , although they are not always present, some versions allude to the figure of a black dog accompanying the fireball or to beings that emit animal-like guttural sounds. These beings reinforce the idea of regression, of the loss of humanity caused by moral transgression. From a symbolic perspective, the animal usually represents unbridled instinct; in this myth, its appearance accentuates the punitive nature and the chaos resulting from error.

The myth of *La Candileja* is also a device of **social representation** , in the sense proposed by Serge Moscovici (1981). Social representations are not simply collective opinions, but symbolic schemes that allow individuals to interpret the world and regulate their behavior. In this case, the figure of *La Candileja* acts as a living metaphor for punishment for deviating from family roles, especially the role of parenting. The community, by telling the story, reinforces a shared representation of familial duty and permanent moral vigilance.

From a philosophical-cultural perspective, this myth can be considered to embody an **archetype of guilt** that, as Carl Gustav Jung (1959) argued, arises from the transgression of the collective unconscious moral order. *The Footlight* not only punishes the grandmother in the myth; it represents the potential punishment for any member of the community who forgets their essential moral duties. Thus, it is integrated into the imaginary as a regulatory figure that acts from the cultural unconscious.

The symbolic representation of *La Candileja* thus integrates visual elements (fire, deformity), auditory elements (screams), spatial elements (liminal territories), and animal elements (bestial forms), all of which are articulated in a relationship that operates as a matrix of moral teaching. The fireball, for example, is not just a fantastical figure: it is the visible metaphor for punishment, a powerful image that synthesizes the deviation from an archetypal duty—the caring grandmother—and its transformation into a threatening figure.

Reflecting on this legend implies recognizing that its symbolic value lies not only in its ability to instill fear, but in its function as a transmitter of norms, limits, and values, through a structure that links ethics with the visual and the narrative. From Platonic archetypes to Aristotle's ethics of the golden mean, passing through contemporary semiotics and the

psychology of symbols, *La Candileja* persists as a powerful figure that represents not only the punishment of error but also the constant warning about the need to fulfill the essential moral duties that sustain community life. When repeated generation after generation, in dark paths or family relationships, it reaffirms a structure of meaning that, although disguised as terror, preserves within its flames the validity of a shared ethic.

ETHICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION

Territory, Myth and Belonging

The legend of *La Candileja* , widely disseminated in various rural regions of Colombia, is not only an orally transmitted moralizing tale, but also a profound manifestation of the symbolic relationship between individuals and the territory they inhabit. In this sense, the myth fulfills an identity-building and social behavior-regulating function in geographic space, providing emotional, cultural, and normative meaning to specific places. Analyzing this legend from a sociocultural perspective, together with the theories of emotional attachment to territory (Giuliani, 2003) and spatial behavior and social control (Altman & Low, 1992), allows us to understand how *La Candileja* is inscribed in a symbolic map in which memory, fear, and identity are intertwined.

Traditionally, *La Candileja* manifests itself in rural geographic spaces, especially lonely roads, unpopulated paths, mountains, and the banks of streams or rivers. These places are not chosen at random: in the peasant worldview, they represent border territories between the safety of domestic space and the danger of the unknown natural world. In departments such as Tolima, Huila, Meta, and southern Cundinamarca, it is common for adults to warn children not to wander through these places after dark to avoid encountering this fiery figure that haunts night owls. In this way, the myth acts as a device for regulating spatial behavior, delimiting safe and unsafe zones, permitted and prohibited times for transit, and reinforcing social surveillance surrounding the use of the territory.

From a sociocultural perspective, as Geertz (1973) suggests, cultures construct meanings through symbols and narratives that allow individuals to interpret their reality. In this context, *La Candileja* functions as a cultural symbol charged with collective significance that guides the spatial experience of communities. The story not only frightens: it also educates, guides, and reinforces the sense of belonging to a place that is perceived not as a neutral space, but as a living fabric of memories and warnings. The places where *La Candileja* appears are thus charged with a symbolic density that transforms the physical landscape into a cultural landscape.

This phenomenon can be understood through the theory of emotional attachment to territory. According to Giuliani (2003), territorial attachment is built through affective, symbolic, and practical interaction with the environment. The inhabitants of areas where the legend is told develop an ambivalent emotional connection with certain places: on the one hand, they fear them because of their association with the supernatural; on the other, they recognize them as a constitutive part of

their cultural identity. Thus, the presence of the myth does not completely discourage contact with the space, but rather reconfigures its social use through the internalization of shared norms and emotions.

The symbolic geography of *La Candileja* also includes elements related to behavioral control, as it delimits not only dangerous zones but also reprehensible practices. In mythical logic, those who face this apparition are usually individuals who have violated social norms: young people who stay out late, drink, or disrespect family hierarchies. This configuration connects with the approach to spatial behavior and social control proposed by Altman and Low (1992), according to which spaces are regulated not only by legal norms but also by symbolic frameworks that induce self-control through fear or morality. In this case, the fear of mythical punishment operates as a force that modulates behavior and preserves the territorial order of the community.

Likewise, *La Candileja* not only marks specific physical sites, but also becomes a reference for organizing the collective memory of communities. In many local stories, the location of past apparitions is precisely narrated: "at the crossroads of the old road," "next to the large ceiba tree," "at the pass of such and such a ravine." These stories function as emotional and narrative cartographies, constructing an alternative map—not visible in official geography— but still current in the subjective and cultural experience of the territory. In this way, "mythical places" are constituted whose symbolic charge influences social practices and intergenerational memory.

This phenomenon can also be associated with what Augé (1993) calls "anthropological places": spaces charged with identity, relationships, and memory. In rural Colombia, the sites associated with the legend of *La Candileja* are precisely those anthropological places where the community recognizes itself through a shared narrative. Unlike "non-

places" (such as shopping malls or highways), these spaces are densely charged with meaning, and their function is not merely practical but also symbolic and emotional.

On the other hand, the territorial persistence of the myth in specific regions—even in times of accelerated urbanization—can also be understood from a logic of cultural resistance. In a country experiencing strong processes of forced displacement and transformation of the rural landscape, the legend of *La Candileja* can be read as a symbolic form of cultural anchoring, a mechanism that protects territorial identity against relocation. As Escobar (2008) argues, territories are not only physical spaces, but cultural constructions from which people negotiate and defend their ways of life. In this context, *La Candileja* acts as a mythical guardian of a territorial order threatened by external forces.

The myth, then, not only conveys fear or morality, but actively participates in the symbolic structuring of the territory. It links space, emotion, norms, and identity, becoming a powerful tool for social organization. Furthermore, the fact that the stories adapt to new generations without losing their territorial anchorage demonstrates the vitality of the myth as a cultural form of resistance and adaptation. The spaces where *La Candileja "appears"* do not change easily, because its meaning is not on the visible surface, but in the symbolic fabric shared by the community.

In this network of symbolic representations, emotions, norms, and history, *La Candileja* embodies a figure that allows us to understand how myths operate as cultural technologies that delimit, organize, and preserve territories. By integrating into the dynamics of behavioral control and reinforcing emotional attachment to certain places, myth becomes a tool for socio-territorial cohesion . It is not just a story of the

past: it is an active way of inhabiting the present and of providing moral and symbolic meaning to lived space.

In short, the places where legend dwells are not simply passive settings, but territories constructed from collective experience, charged with emotions and norms, and reinforced by narratives that define what is permitted, what is feared, and what is valued. The myth of *La Candileja* reveals how the symbolic dimension of territory shapes the social and emotional life of communities, consolidating local identity in the face of structural changes in the environment. In its archetypal fire and its invisible routes along rural roads, the living memory of a profound Colombia persists, where myth still regulates, protects, and gives meaning to the relationship between being and its space.

Myth, place and belonging

The legend of *La Candileja* , present in the Colombian popular imagination, constitutes much more than a folkloric tale with subtle moralizing: it is a form of cultural transmission that directly influences the territorial identity and sense of belonging of rural communities. Through its oral accounts, the fiery figure of *La Candileja* not only frightens or corrects social behaviors, but also becomes deeply rooted in the symbolic landscape of the national geography, activating processes of emotional bonding, territoriality and collective identity. From the sociocultural perspective and studies on emotional attachment to space (Giuliani, 2003; Tuan , 1977), as well as from the analysis of spatial behavior as a form of social control (Altman & Low, 1992), this legend is configured as a narrative device that strengthens local or regional cohesion and belonging.

The myth of *La Candileja* circulates in departments such as Tolima, Huila, Meta, Caquetá, and parts of the Coffee Region, anchored to rural

routes, paths, and waterways. These spaces are not neutral: they form part of the communities' emotional and symbolic map, and the appearance of the wandering fire, representing a grandmother condemned for overindulging her grandchildren, acts as a moral warning. This mythical presence, more than coincidental, is positioned in specific territories that constitute a symbolic geography, where fear, norms, and memory intertwine. In the words of Geertz (1973), culture is "a network of shared meanings," and *La Candileja* becomes an interpretive code that allows us to interpret the territorial environment through an ethical and collective logic.

Within the sociocultural approach, myth functions as a structuring narrative that articulates the experience of space and belonging to it. It is not simply a matter of locating the myth in a territory, but rather how this territory is experienced, recorded, and felt through the myth. In this sense, the stories that mention the appearance of *La Candileja* on lonely roads, near rivers, or coffee plantations, become sites marked by collective memory, "anthropological sites," according to Augé (1993), where the emotional history of the community is sedimented. The legend offers an alternative topography, laden with warnings, emotions, and values.

The sense of territorial belonging is forged, in part, through the emotional bond with inhabited places, and this bond is intensified when mediated by shared narratives. As Giuliani (2003) states, emotional attachment to territory implies a lasting emotional connection with a place that is associated with significant experiences. *La Candileja* , when repeated orally from generation to generation, links individuals not only to their community but also to the very land they inhabit, fostering an emotional belonging that is reinforced by family and community memory. Thus, when someone narrates that "at such a bend in the road,

La Candileja appeared to a night owl uncle," not only is a moral warning transmitted, but an emotional connection with the territory is reactivated.

In turn, spatial behavior is influenced by these types of relationships. Altman and Low (1992) have argued that spatial practices are conditioned by both formal norms and symbolic frameworks that determine what is permitted, what is dangerous, what is passable, and what is prohibited. In this framework, *La Candileja* becomes a narrative instrument of territorial regulation: people avoid certain roads at night, modify their routes, or adjust their behavior based on the warnings contained in the myth. This symbolic control, although not institutional, is effective in consolidating norms of space use and individual behavior, reinforcing community cohesion.

The myth's geographical configuration is also articulated with processes of regional identity. Local stories emphasize that *La Candileja* "appears on these roads," "is seen on this path," "has been seen in this canyon." These narratives not only locate the myth spatially, but also localize it culturally, associating it with specific ways of life, customs, and landscapes. This identity-based approach reinforces the sense of regional belonging, differentiating the inhabitants of those areas from other populations. In other words, *La Candileja* also operates as a cultural marker of symbolic territoriality: those who know and fear the myth are part of the group; those who ignore it are excluded from the local symbolic fabric.

In this sense, the myth not only shapes the geographic space but also acts as a means of cultural affirmation in the face of homogenizing dynamics imposed by globalization or forced displacement. As Escobar (2008) argues, territories are cultural constructions from which the right to difference is defended and subaltern identities are affirmed. The

persistence of *La Candileja* in local narratives is a way of resisting the disappearance of ancestral knowledge, of protecting the connection to the land, and of sustaining a particular way of inhabiting the world.

Likewise, this myth also allows us to interpret territory as a moral space. From classical philosophy, Plato argued that the human soul must be disciplined to achieve just order, and Aristotle maintained that virtue was cultivated through practice within the polis. Within this philosophical framework, *La Candileja* acts as a mythical incarnation of moral punishment, where physical space becomes the stage for ethical conflict. Rural roads are not just functional routes: they are testing grounds, where the character of individuals confronts their own morality. In this way, the legend creates an ethical cartography of space, where territories acquire a meaning that transcends the physical.

The symbolic power of myth, anchored to a place and a history, provides a powerful tool for reinforcing community identity. It's not simply about avoiding *La Candileja* , but about sharing a common vision of the territory, feeling that one belongs to a common story, and that this story gives meaning to the place one inhabits. This process of symbolic appropriation of the territory, mediated by myth, transforms the geographical space into a lived, experienced, and shared space, which is essential for building resilient and culturally cohesive communities.

When contemplating the symbolic trajectory of *La Candileja* , it becomes evident that its function goes beyond the mythical narrative: it shapes the emotional and social relationship between individuals and their land, regulates behavior, and strengthens collective identities. In its wandering fire, which travels through dark paths and ancient memories, also burns the resilience of a people to keep their culture, their memory, and their connection to the land alive. It is in the persistence of these stories that a way of living, thinking, and inhabiting the land is

safeguarded, deeply rooted in the emotional history of Colombia's rural communities.

ETHICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION

Moral and Rural Fable

The legend of *La Candileja* , widely spread in rural Colombia, represents a complex network of oral storytelling, traditional pedagogy, and popular ethics. Its relevance, passed down from generation to generation, lies in its ability to condense values and anti-values within a story that dramatizes the moral consequences of deviant behavior. This spectral figure, described as a burning flame that wanders the roads, represents the condemnation of a grandmother who was permissive toward her grandchildren, who, after her death, is punished for her lack of authority.

Essentially, the myth fulfills a regulatory function of social behavior, serving as an informal pedagogical tool that embodies the postulates of classical behaviorism, where learning is associated with stimuli, punishments, and reinforcements (Skinner, 1971).

The behaviorist approach maintains that human behavior is the result of learned associations between stimuli and responses. Within this theoretical framework, punishment becomes a central mechanism for behavior modification. *The Limelight* , as a narrative representation of punishment, aligns with the postulates of B.F. Skinner, who argued that the consequences of an action directly influence the likelihood of that action being repeated (Skinner, 1953). In this sense, the legend operates as an instance of social conditioning, where the fear of a supernatural apparition reinforces norms of obedience, respect for family authority, and fulfillment of parental duty.

From the perspective of popular ethics, *La Candileja* projects a strong normative value around the role of grandparents and caregivers within the family structure. The story warns of the dangers of excessive permissiveness and the absence of limits, condemning unreasonable indulgence as a form of moral negligence. In this tale, the grandmother is punished not for cruelty, but for indulgence. The implicit message is clear: love without discipline leads to moral degeneration, both for the children and the adult who raises them. This type of moral teaching, formulated from popular narrative, reflects a traditional ethic based on moderation, duty, and impulse control—concepts also present in Aristotelian philosophy, although translated here into rural and oral contexts.

In terms of anti-values, the legend condemns irresponsibility, educational neglect, weakness of character, and lack of self-control. These are presented as direct causes of the eternal punishment to which

the spectral grandmother is subjected. Through this archetype, a negative pedagogy is established: non-virtuous characters not only fail, but are also condemned as exemplary. This narrative structure coincides with the behaviorist principle of learning by consequence: error must be followed by punishment to generate lasting behavioral change (Watson, 1913). Consequently, children and adults who hear the myth receive a clear message about the social and spiritual consequences of their behavior.

On the other hand, *La Candileja* also acts as an agent of social control from a broader perspective. In rural communities where formal institutions of education or justice are not always present or are weak, myths take on the role of regulating behavior. Following Durkheim (1912), myths and popular rites serve the function of preserving social cohesion and reinforcing collective norms. The legend functions as a parallel instance of moralization that, without the need for a state apparatus, establishes norms of coexistence and criteria of what is acceptable. In other words, the myth is part of the informal pedagogical fabric of the community.

Furthermore, the story incorporates elements of symbolic surveillance. The wandering fire of *La Candileja* , which appears on dark roads or in lonely places, not only instills fear but also marks zones of moral warning. In this sense, the myth promotes self-censorship and preventive reflection. People avoid certain behaviors not because of the certainty of physical punishment, but because of the internalization of a mythical threat. As Bandura (1977) posits in his social learning theory, human behavior is also regulated through processes of observation and imitation. By listening to the stories of those who “saw La Candileja” or “were chased by it,” subjects internalize fear as a self-control mechanism.

From an educational perspective, the myth serves a didactic function. It is no coincidence that the legend is told especially to children or adolescents, in family or informal school settings. This narrative becomes a form of moral literacy, teaching the limits of acceptable behavior, the importance of respect for one's elders, and the role of discipline in parenting. Such teaching is not provided through the rational exposition of rules, but rather through the emotional impact produced by relationships. In the words of Paulo Freire (1970), all education is political and entails an ethical intention. Although from a critical pedagogy perspective, one could question the methodology of fear, there is no doubt that *La Candileja* is part of the repertoire of informal education that structures the values of many generations.

Likewise, this mythical figure is intertwined with representations of gender and caregiving in rural communities. The punishment of the indulgent grandmother also serves as a warning to women caregivers, reinforcing traditional roles of responsible motherhood and domestic authority. This symbolic construction suggests that the maternal or grandparental role must be accompanied by firmness, balance, and moral vigilance. The myth thus becomes a vehicle that perpetuates certain visions of gender and family order, without necessarily questioning them.

The pedagogy embedded in the legend, therefore, is articulated with a community ethic based on reciprocity, responsibility, and moral authority. In this sense, *La Candileja* is not a simple folkloric character: she is a symbol of narrative justice, a mechanism for ethical transmission, and a tool for cultural regulation. When told and retold, she reinforces the values that allow rural communities to structure their daily lives and their childcare systems.

Recapitulating this journey, we understand that *La Candileja* is not just a folk tale intended to frighten, but a cultural device deeply linked to informal education, the transmission of values, and the moral control of communities. Its power lies not only in the threat it represents, but in its ability to shape social behavior through symbolic fear, shared memory, and narrative repetition. In rural Colombia, this legend becomes a powerful pedagogical tool, where ethics merge with narrative and where the myth teaches without classrooms or textbooks, but with a formative effectiveness that endures over time.

Moral Reward and Punishment

The legend of *La Candileja* , originating in the Colombian rural imagination, constitutes a myth that transcends the merely narrative and becomes a mechanism of moral and pedagogical regulation. This supernatural figure—a fiery, fluctuating sphere that punishes those who do wrong—represents a symbolic construct that rewards or punishes specific social behaviors, especially those linked to family duties, childrearing, and intergenerational respect. From a behaviorist approach to pedagogy, where human behavior is explained through stimuli, responses, and consequences, the myth of *La Candileja* can be interpreted as a cultural tool of moral conditioning and social reinforcement (Skinner, 1971; Watson, 1913).

In terms of structure, the legend tells the story of a grandmother who, in life, was excessively permissive with her grandchildren. After her death, she is condemned to wander as a fiery figure, punished for her lack of moral firmness. This story sanctions not only the misconduct of children raised without limits, but also the adult negligence that enables such behavior. Thus, the narrative not only punishes childhood behavioral disorders, but also the lack of authority and control in caregivers, promoting a balanced parenting ideal based on positive reinforcement

and corrective punishment, as proposed by the behaviorist postulates of Thorndike (1932) and Skinner (1953).

The behaviorist approach emphasizes the importance of reinforcement in consolidating desirable behaviors. According to Skinner (1953), positive reinforcement increases the likelihood of repeating a behavior, while punishment—as a negative consequence—reduces it. In the legend, the punished behaviors include childhood indiscipline, disrespect for elders, and a lack of ethical boundaries. At the same time, the story symbolically rewards opposing behaviors: obedience, intergenerational respect, parental responsibility, and emotional control. Although the reward is not explicitly stated as in classic moralistic tales, it is inferred from the absence of punishment or the moral tranquility that surrounds those who fulfill their family and community roles.

This story also allows for the establishment of a moral pedagogy based on indirect observation. According to Bandura (1977), individuals learn not only through direct experience but also by observing the consequences others face. *The Limelight* thus functions as a warning, a negative role model that allows listeners—especially the youngest—to internalize the values expected by the community. Through the symbolic fear of apparition, a form of preventive self-control is reinforced, aligned with traditional social patterns of coexistence, where authority figures (such as parents and grandparents) are expected to preemptively guide the behavior of minors.

From this perspective, the myth fulfills an ethical function by establishing a clear distinction between right and wrong. Permissiveness, understood as the failure to correct, becomes a sin that affects not only those who suffer from it—the children—but also those who permit it—the adult. In this way, *La Candileja* condemns moral relativism and proposes an ethic of firmness and formative intervention,

where child education is conceived as a collective responsibility that does not admit neutrality or passivity.

In the context of a rural society where oral tradition plays an essential role in the transmission of knowledge and values, this type of storytelling takes on a non-institutionalized pedagogical dimension. According to Freire (1970), all education implies an ethical and political intention, even when this is transmitted outside the classroom. In this sense, the legend functions as an informal pedagogical tool that shapes character through fear and repetition, generating lasting learning without the need for formal teaching structures. This type of pedagogy, although criticized for its foundation in fear, has been highly effective in communities with limited access to institutional education.

Furthermore, the legend acts as a narrative device of social control, especially effective in contexts where the State and its regulatory institutions are weak or distant. In this sense, they coincide with what Durkheim (1912) called the social function of myth: reinforcing cohesion through the symbolic reproduction of collective norms. The appearance of *the Footlight* in lonely places or late at night operates as a metaphor for moral conscience and internalized social control. Thus, the myth regulates nocturnal behavior, respect for elders, and family obedience without the need for direct supervision.

The eternal punishment suffered by the maternal and grandmotherly figure also reinforces traditional gender roles, in which caregiving implies not only protection but also correction and moral formation. The permissive grandmother is rejected, not for her lack of affection, but for her lack of discipline. Thus, a firm ethic of care is established, in which boundless love loses its educational value. In line with behaviorist pedagogy, not only educational intention is required, but also the

effective action of rewarding what is right and punishing what is wrong (Bijou & Baer, 1961).

From the perspective of moral education, *The Limelight* conveys a clear lesson: every action has consequences, and every failure to fulfill one's duty generates responsibility. At this point, the myth approaches the notion of "vicarious responsibility" that underlies many traditional ethical systems, where adults are responsible not only for their own actions but also for those of those under their care. This moral dimension of the story reaffirms the value of example, control, and guidance, fundamental pillars of all education within the framework of behaviorism (Thorndike, 1932).

On an emotional level, the legend also allows for the establishment of effective pedagogical connections, since the impact it generates in listeners mobilizes not only thought but also affection and fear. This type of emotional learning, although rudimentary, allows for a deeper imprinting of the moral message. According to Goleman (1995), emotions play a decisive role in decision-making and ethical learning. Thus, the symbolic terror of *La Candileja* becomes an emotional lever that strengthens the internalization of values such as respect, discipline, and responsibility.

As a whole, the legend is not only part of Colombia's oral heritage, but also constitutes an educational device charged with ethical intentions. It operates as a pedagogy of fear, yes, but also as a system of moral prevention. The threat of *La Candileja* functions as a form of negative reinforcement that allows the subject to anticipate the consequences of their actions and act in accordance with social expectations. This anticipation is precisely one of the central mechanisms of learning according to behaviorist theory (Skinner, 1953).

In short, analyzing *La Candileja* from its ethical and pedagogical perspective allows us to understand it as a myth that shapes behavior through symbolic rewards and sanctions. This legend punishes negligent indulgence and disobedience, while simultaneously rewarding—through the omission of punishment—responsibility, discipline, and respect. It is a narrative system of behavioral control, a community pedagogy forged through oral tradition and sustained by emotionality. Its relevance lies not only in the power of the story, but in its ability to offer effective moral guidance, effectively transmitted and reinforced by the imagery of eternal punishment. Thus, *La Candileja* continues to operate as a metaphor for the moral order, a living warning, a burning reflection of the popular pedagogy that teaches through fear to preserve social harmony.

AESTHETICS AND NARRATIVE

Complexity of the Oral Story

The legend of *La Candileja* , deeply rooted in the Colombian collective imagination, is a cultural manifestation that transcends the merely anecdotal to establish itself as a tale full of symbolism, complex narrative structure and aesthetic richness. Its value lies not only in the moral warning it conveys, but in the way it is composed: a narrative rich

in layers, with archetypes, symbolic climaxes and a literary architecture that reveals a collective elaboration through generations. This legend, like all popular myths, possesses the characteristic features of a mythical structure that is perpetuated by its expressive flexibility and symbolic depth, aspects that have been addressed by various theorists of narrative and literary language such as Propp (1928), Barthes (1972) or Todorov (1969).

From a structuralist perspective, *The Limelight* can be analyzed through the morphology of the folk tale proposed by Vladimir Propp in his work *Morphology of the Tale* . In this theory, Propp identifies recurring narrative functions that form a kind of skeleton for folk tales, tales such as punishment, test, hero, antagonist, and transformation. In the legend at hand, we observe the moral transformation of the central figure (the permissive grandmother), her post-mortem punishment, and her conversion into a supernatural creature, which constitutes a symbolic metamorphosis with a great poetic and didactic charge. The figure of *The Limelight* thus functions as a symbol of irreversible consequence and, in turn, as a narrative mechanism of cyclical closure, where the end is not redemption but a warning.

Furthermore, its narrative complies with what Barthes (1972) identifies as levels of reading the myth: on the one hand, the denotative level (the explicit story of a grandmother who turns into fire for spoiling her grandchildren), and on the other, the connotative level, where meanings are projected onto family, punishment, transgression and duty. This polysemy in its interpretation gives the myth a discursive richness that allows for multiple readings: psychological, moral, pedagogical, feminist and even ecological, depending on the interpretive context of the listener.

In terms of its aesthetic dimension, *The Limelight* deploys a powerful symbolic configuration: the image of a ball of fire traveling through the night skies, emitting sparks, buzzing or moaning sounds, which can split into three fires or manifest as a wandering specter. This imaginative display accounts for a rich visual construction, conveyed through precise sensory descriptions, implicit metaphors, and mythical analogies that intensify the aesthetic experience of the story. As Bachelard (1949) points out in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* , fire in mythology represents both destruction and purification, fear and transformation. *The Limelight* , by presenting itself as a wandering fire, condenses this symbolic duality, lending a poetic density to its image.

The story also has a nonlinear temporal structure, typical of ancestral oral narratives, in which mythical time overlaps chronological time. The legend does not take place in a precise past or in a fixed place; its geography and chronology are diffuse, allowing it to be set in any rural or urban present, adapting to the listener's imagination. This timeless character reinforces what Lévi-Strauss (1958) identifies as one of the essential features of myth: its capacity to express structural oppositions (life/death, duty/transgression, order/chaos) within a narrative framework that does not require exact historical coordinates to produce meaning.

Regarding the characterization, it can be said that *The Limelight* presents a symbolic richness in the construction of its protagonist. She is not a simple demonic figure; she is a grandmother, a caregiver, a maternal figure who, in her transgression, was not cruel but indulgent. This narrative choice introduces a profound moral complexity, as it does not punish active evil, but rather passive omission. The character is not a typical villain, but a tragic figure, which introduces a more elaborate dramatic dimension into the structure of the story. This dramatic

complexity can be understood in Aristotelian terms as a " hamartia ," a tragic error that triggers the fall (Aristotle, *Poetics*), granting the story an emotional depth that surpasses a simple horror tale.

Likewise, the oral dimension of the legend gives it narrative plasticity. Its intergenerational transmission has allowed for the existence of multiple versions, each with a particular emphasis according to the context: some highlight the fireball that pursues disobedient people, others emphasize its appearance on rural roads, or the sound it makes when approaching. This narrative variability is a sign of literary and creative richness, as it allows for continuous reinterpretations of the same symbolic core. According to Walter Benjamin (1936), oral narration is richer when it does not seek a definitive closure of meaning, but rather opens itself to collective reinterpretation. *La Candileja* , in this sense, is a dynamic legend, not a closed one, open to aesthetic improvisation and symbolic adaptation.

From a literary reception theory proposed by Hans Robert Jauss (1970), the narrative richness of a text or myth also depends on the response it evokes in the recipient. In the case of *La Candileja* , the multiplicity of possible readings, the emotional intensity it awakens, and its capacity to generate vivid mental images make it a work of high aesthetic intensity. The listener's experience is not passive; they must interpret, reconstruct, and imagine. The fear it generates is not only an effect of its content, but also of the way it is told, the oral cadence, the pauses, and the rhetorical devices employed. Here its value as popular art is evident: it not only informs, but also moves, shocks, and mobilizes.

On the other hand, if viewed from a semiotic perspective, such as that of Greimas (1983), the story encloses a narrative contract in which subjects act according to axes of opposition: permission vs. discipline, authority vs. weakness, punishment vs. reward. These deep structures configure a

non-linear relationship, but one full of ruptures, displacements, and transformations that demand an active reading. The aesthetics of the myth lie not only in its formal elements, but in its symbolic coherence, in its narrative economy—which says a lot with few elements—and in its expressive power, which has allowed its survival and adaptation for centuries.

Finally, when observing *La Candileja* as an integral narrative unit, it is possible to affirm that its structural, symbolic, and aesthetic richness makes it a complex expression of Colombian oral art. It carries poetic forms, symbolic structures, and cultural values that intertwine in a relationship that is not flat, but layered. The tension between the everyday (a grandmother), the moral (her excessive indulgence), and the supernatural (her fiery punishment) generates a narrative effect that allows for multiple readings and a powerful emotional reception. The aesthetic complexity is not an embellishment of the legend, but the key to its endurance.

In short, the legend of *La Candileja* is a narrative structure of great symbolic, emotional, and literary richness. Its compositional elements, its interpretive plasticity, the visual power of its images, and the ethical depth of its plot place it among the most aesthetically charged folk tales in Colombian literature. The combination of a coherent symbolic structure, a tragic figure with emotional resonance, and an oral tradition open to constant reinvention makes it a narrative testimony of complexity and beauty. This literary richness is not accidental, but rather the product of a folk wisdom that has successfully woven stories over time that, like *La Candileja* , illuminate not only with fire, but with meaning.

Poetics of the Walking Fire

The legend of *La Candileja* constitutes a narrative testimony of Colombian popular aesthetics rooted in oral tradition, where expressive mechanisms such as metaphor, hyperbole, and, in certain versions, dark or grotesque humor converge. This amalgamation of resources is not accidental, but rather a reflection of a complex narrative construction that allows the myth to endure, adapt, and maintain its emotional and pedagogical relevance. In the figure of *La Candileja* , language not only conveys a story of moral cautionary tale, but also shapes an aesthetically dense symbolic universe. In this sense, analyzing its narrative from the perspective of the rhetorical devices employed allows us to discover a literary richness that transcends the anecdote and is inscribed within the framework of collective creativity.

One of the most notable elements in the legend is the metaphor of fire as a symbol of eternal punishment and spiritual transformation. As Gaston Bachelard (1949) points out in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* , this element has an ambivalent character: purifying and destructive, luminous and terrifying. *La Candileja* is, in essence, fire incarnate; not only a soul in torment, but a living metaphor for overindulgence and the abandonment of moral duty. The image of a woman who, for spoiling her grandchildren, becomes a fiery sphere that travels the night skies or the rural roads of Colombia, translates an ethical metaphor into a visual narrative charged with expressive force. This opera of transformation is not only a moral punishment, but an artistic representation of a collective emotion: the fear of unpunished transgression.

The use of hyperbole is also central to imbuing the story with drama and magnificence. In various versions, *The Limelight is described* as an immense ball of fire that lights up the sky or splits into three frantically rotating flames, causing deafening noise, destroying homes, or even insanity in the beholder. These rhetorical exaggerations respond to what

Roland Barthes (1972) calls the "effect of intense signification," in which the hyperbolic seeks not literal credibility but emotional intensity. In this sense, the story not only informs but also moves and dramatizes, reinforcing its performative nature and its power of intergenerational transmission.

In some oral versions, a dark, even grotesque, humor is introduced when describing how *La Candileja* chases drunken men, spins them in the air, or makes them fall into swamps. This type of macabre humor does not contradict the tragic dimension of the myth, but rather reinforces it, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) argues in *Popular Culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* . For Bakhtin, grotesque humor serves a social function: it allows people to appropriate fear through laughter, relativizing terror to integrate it into their worldview. Thus, *La Candileja* not only provokes fear, but can generate nervous laughter, a cathartic laugh that reveals the myth's aesthetic capacity to modulate diverse emotions.

From a narrative perspective, *The Limelight* is articulated through a coherent symbolic structure. The story unfolds as a cycle: there is a morally flawed past (the grandmother's permissiveness), an eternal punishment (the transformation into fire), and a supernatural persistence (its continued presence in the world). This circularity is related to the mythical narrative structures analyzed by Mircea Eliade (1957), who pointed out that myth reactivates a "sacred time," a time outside of ordinary history. The presence of *The Limelight* in the story does not obey a human chronology, but rather a mythical time that is reactivated each time the story is told, and each time someone hears strange noises in the night and thinks of it.

From a literary perspective, the story's aesthetic can be understood as an example of what Italo Calvino (1988) defines as "lightness," one of the fundamental values of creative narrative. Although the story conveys

a severe moral message, it does so through images that are light in form but dense in meaning: a floating fire, a cry in the wind, a fleeting shadow. This narrative economy, based on powerful images and simple words, is a sophisticated form of poetic expression that characterizes the most enduring folk tales.

In terms of its creative nature, *La Candileja* is a collective construction in constant rewriting. Its richness is measured not only by the beauty or drama of a specific version, but by its malleability to transform according to the context. In indigenous, rural, or urban versions, the story adapts, changing accents, settings, and accents, confirming what Paul Ricoeur (1983) maintained: the stories that survive are not the most truthful, but rather those that best articulate the symbolic and aesthetic needs of their recipients. Thus, *La Candileja* is an open narrative artifact that allows for re-creation without losing its symbolic core.

Literary richness is also evident in the use of parallelisms and alliterations characteristic of oral tradition. In many traditional stories, narrators use repetitive formulas, changes in rhythm, dramatic pauses, and wordplay that reinforce the aural image of the myth. This sonic and rhythmic dimension is key to understanding the aesthetics of the legend as a complete sensory experience, not just a visual one. In this sense, it aligns with what Walter Ong (1982) defines as the characteristics of primary orality: cumulative narration, redundancy, stylized formulas, and a strong appeal to memory. Far from being a limitation, this expressive economy is an aesthetic sophistication in itself.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi 's (1996) model on creativity, who proposes that popular narratives are forms of socially distributed creativity, where the community acts as a selective field for the stories that are kept alive. In this sense, the legend of *La Candileja* is a creative form of high symbolic intensity, culturally legitimized by its capacity to communicate

deep emotions through simple poetic resources, memorable images and open metaphors.

As a narrative form, *The Limelight* is also a testament to the aesthetics of otherness. It presents itself as the other: the anomalous, the nocturnal, that which escapes the natural order. But in its difference, it expresses shared values, fears, and codes. It is in this duality between beauty and unease, between metaphor and threat, that its aesthetic power is revealed. The poetics of myth lies in its ambiguity: in its capacity to provoke fear and fascination at the same time, which aligns it with what Edmund Burke (1757) called the "sublime," that aesthetic category that arises in the face of that which is simultaneously beautiful and terrifying.

In short, the legend of *La Candileja* is not a meager or anecdotal tale, but an aesthetic device laden with symbolism, expressive resources, and collective creativity. Through the use of visual metaphors, dramatic hyperbole, and dark humor, it stands as a work of oral art that synthesizes emotions, values, and warnings in an effective literary form. This expressive richness is not accidental, but the result of centuries of narrative experimentation, cultural adaptation, and the aesthetic sensitivity of those who have told, heard, and transformed it. The legend survives not only because of its moral message, but because that message has been imbued with beauty, intensity, and emotion by the poetic language of the people.

CAPACITY FOR ADAPTATION

Mutable echoes of myth

The legend of *La Candileja* has roamed the fringes of the Colombian imagination for generations, embodying more than a simple supernatural warning: it is a living metaphor that mutates with the passage of time. Its persistence over the centuries is not due exclusively to its terrifying component or its moralizing charge, but to its remarkable ability to adapt to different historical, political, and social contexts. In this artistic capacity, *La Candileja* not only retains its narrative essence but is constantly reinterpreted to reflect the concerns, tensions, and values of the communities that keep it alive. As Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964) argues, the myth is not exhausted by its literal content but is perpetuated by its flexible structure, which allows for multiple interpretations and applications. The legend, in this sense, is not a cultural fossil, but an active symbolic organism.

In its most traditional form, *La Candileja* is presented as the punishment inflicted on a grandmother who spoiled her grandchildren, causing them to grow up with deviant and dishonorable behavior. Upon her death, the woman is condemned to wander in the form of fire forever. This story was originally interpreted as a critique of moral permissiveness, the abandonment of adult responsibility, and the disintegration of family ties. However, the symbolic richness of the myth has allowed this figure to be used, at different times and in different regions, to express broader conflicts: the weakening of authority, the fear of chaos, the dissolution of social order, or even the reaction to cultural transformations perceived as threats.

During the 19th century, for example, when Colombia experienced profound political and social transformations—such as the transition from colonial to republican order and the consolidation of the nation-state—the figure of *La Candileja (The Candlestick)* was articulated as a symbol of the fear of the loss of familial and moral control. The

grandmother turned into a wandering flame reflected the fear of conservative elites in the face of the advance of liberal values that promoted individual autonomy and questioned traditional hierarchies. According to Peter Burke 's analysis (1997), folk tales tend to become mechanisms of cultural resistance to change, recovering and dramatizing imaginaries of order and sanction. In this sense, *La Candileja* can be read as a symbolic warning against the dangers of altering the status quo.

In the 20th century, and especially during the decades of bipartisan violence, the myth found a new framework for interpretation. The wandering fire began to be represented not only as a figure of individual punishment, but also as a presence that monitored collective behavior. In peasant tales, for example, *La Candileja was said* to appear to those who had betrayed their word, participated in acts of violence, or abused their power. This redefinition of the myth expanded its ethical function and transformed it into a broader tool of social control. As Bronislaw Malinowski (1926) points out, myths serve a pragmatic function in traditional societies: they legitimate norms and conduct, sanctioning and uniting the community. Thus, *La Candileja* became a symbol of moral judgment in the face of the disorder of a society marked by impunity and pain.

With the advancement of mass media and the expansion of cities, the legend also penetrated urban imaginations. It was no longer just a story of rural roads or distant towns: *La Candileja* began to be told in peripheral neighborhoods, with adaptations that reflected new anxieties. In contemporary versions, for example, fire is said to appear in areas where crimes or acts of social neglect, such as the abandonment of the elderly or child abuse, have occurred. This versatility of the myth demonstrates what Umberto Eco (1979) called an "open work": a

narrative that, although based on an archetype, adapts to the cultural, emotional, and ethical conditions of the recipient.

From a psychological perspective, this adaptability can be understood as an expression of the symbolic function of myth in the face of internal and collective conflicts. Carl Gustav Jung (1964) demonstrated that myths are manifestations of the collective unconscious, that is, representations that connect human beings with universal archetypes such as the mother, the shadow, fire, or guilt. *The Footlight* , as a mythical figure, can be seen as a symbolic projection of the maternal shadow and the fire of remorse, which explains its emotional persistence. As contexts change, history transforms to continue connecting with those same archetypal nuclei, giving them new faces, settings, and meanings.

Behaviorist pedagogy can also provide a key to understanding the adaptability of myth. According to B.F. Skinner (1953), human behavior is shaped by systems of positive and negative reinforcement, and narrative is a tool that conditions behavior by associating actions with consequences. In this sense, *The Limelight* acts as a negative reinforcement: it symbolically punishes disobedience, excessive permissiveness, neglect of responsibilities, or injustice. But what is relevant is that the "punished behaviors" change with the times: what in the past was spoiling grandchildren, today may be neglecting the elderly, drug use, or dishonesty in public life. The myth adapts because the cultural reinforcement system also changes, and the story retains its effectiveness by reinventing the behaviors it punishes.

The political dimension of the myth has also been explored in contexts of cultural resistance. In Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, *La Candileja* has been reinterpreted as a symbol of struggle against spiritual colonization. In some cases, fire is not presented as

punishment, but as the protective energy of the ancestors, which runs through the territories to defend collective memory. This appropriation of the myth as a tool of empowerment shows that its capacity for adaptation is not limited to dominant values, but can be transformed by subaltern voices. As Homi argues, Bhabha (1994), cultural narratives can be re-signified in processes of hybridity and counter-narration , which allows the same story to have multiple meanings depending on the context of enunciation.

From a theoretical perspective on narrative versatility, Jerome Bruner (1990) emphasizes that human beings understand their world through narrative structures, and that these structures adapt to changes in the cultural environment. *The Footlight* is precisely one of those "modular" narratives, allowing the subject to identify with their fundamental emotions—fear, guilt, loss—while contextualizing them in current situations. This symbolic plasticity is what makes the legend an effective educational, emotional, and social tool.

Reflecting on the many faces of *La Candileja* throughout time reveals an essential quality of living myths: their power of metamorphosis. Its narrative structure may remain relatively constant, but its meaning changes with the context in which it is interpreted. This legend has been both rural and urban, moralistic and critical, terrifying and protective; it has been a symbol of lost authority and popular justice. Its fire not only lights the paths of the night, but also those of identity, fear, memory, and transformation. Its symbolic power lies precisely in this capacity for adaptation: in its versatility to embrace the fears, desires, and tensions of every era, every community, every individual. In *La Candileja* , human beings see not only a punishment or a warning, but a shifting mirror in which the deepest and most contradictory dimensions of their existence are projected.

Transmedia of the Popular Fire

The legend of *La Candileja* , as part of Colombian mythical heritage, stands as a versatile figure capable of transcending the traditional frameworks of oral storytelling. Unlike other static or strictly regional legends, *La Candileja* displays a remarkable capacity for adaptation and transposition into diverse expressive media, stories such as film, theater, digital animation, graphic literature, or video games. This versatility not only allows it to expand into new audiences and aesthetics, but also reinforces its symbolic power in contemporary contexts where orality has given way to audiovisual and playful forms of storytelling. As Henry Jenkins (2006) argues, in the current environment of media convergence, cultural relations survive and are strengthened when they are able to migrate to other languages and adapt to new technologies without losing their essential narrative core.

Traditionally, *La Candileja* has been understood as the figure of an old woman who, after spoiling her grandchildren and allowing their moral corruption, is condemned after death to wander in the form of a ball of incandescent fire. This symbol, powerful due to its moralizing and aesthetic charge, has been a transmitter of collective values, symbolic punishments, and family warnings. But what makes this legend special in the national narrative panorama is its ease with which it can be reimagined from different expressive structures, even without needing to modify its essence. The metaphor of fire as punishment, a watchful presence, or a supernatural entity offers a rich iconography that can be easily transposed into visual and theatrical language. This quality responds to what Vladimir Propp (1928) defines as the minimal narrative functions of folk tales, which can be preserved even if the contexts or forms of representation change.

In the field of theater, for example, *La Candileja* offers dramaturgical possibilities that have been explored in both costumbrista theater and political or symbolic theater. The character of the wandering grandmother can embody the tension between tradition and modernity, the voice of ancestral memory, or the presence of collective guilt. In contemporary productions, the story has been reinterpreted to address social issues such as domestic violence, the abandonment of the elderly, and generational conflict. According to Augusto Boal (1998), the theater of the oppressed allows myths to be reinterpreted as platforms for dialogue between symbolic oppression and resistance. In this sense, *La Candileja* is not only a stage material but also a vehicle for social critique and collective reflection.

In the cinematic realm, the legend has not yet been sufficiently exploited in Colombian commercial cinema, although its potential is immense. Its aesthetic, linked to fire, night, rural mystery, and the symbolic weight of moral punishment, offers ideal visual conditions for psychological horror, family drama, and even supernatural thrillers. Filmmakers such as Guillermo del Toro have demonstrated how Latin American myths can be reinvented through cinema without losing their cultural power (Del Toro, 2010). In this context, *La Candileja* could serve as the axis of a visual narrative that recovers the Andean atmosphere, social tensions, the poetics of punishment, and maternal symbolism.

Digital narrative and video games represent another fertile field for the expansion of the myth. In this sense, the gamification of *La Candileja* does not simply involve transforming its story into entertainment, but rather translating its ethical and symbolic function into interactive mechanics. A video game based on the legend could place the player in a rural Colombian context, confronting them with moral dilemmas or decisions that trigger the appearance or avoidance of the wandering fire.

Jane McGonigal (2011) asserts that video games can become profound formative experiences when they integrate symbolic, ethical, and cultural dilemmas into their dynamics. The myth, then, ceases to be passively contemplated and becomes an active, transformative, immersive experience. The player not only "plays" with *La Candileja* , but is implicated in its structure of punishment, memory, and redemption.

From a semiotic and cultural perspective, Umberto Eco (1979) defines narratives that survive over time as "open works," susceptible to multiple readings, interpretations, and reconfigurations. *The Candileja* fulfills this condition, as its mythical structure and moral message can be reinterpreted from modern perspectives: the grandmother can be seen as a victim of patriarchy, as a symbol of intergenerational forgetting, or as a grieving witness to the deterioration of community values. The possibility of reinterpretation without losing symbolic density makes this legend one of the most suitable for transmedia expansion and intercultural dialogue.

The cultural theory of postmodernism also provides elements to understand this capacity for adaptation. Fredric Jameson (1991) argues that in the era of fragmented narratives, traditional stories find new uses when they are recycled, parodied, or subverted. *The Limelight* can appear in urban comics, digital graffiti, animated shorts, or even memes, without losing its resonance. This dispersion of image and story, far from weakening them, enriches them. Fire is no longer just punishment: it can be denunciation, resistance, memory, irony. The myth disseminates, fractures, and multiplies in cultural spaces where it remains relevant.

From an anthropological perspective on myth, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964) argues that myth is a structured language that operates through symbolic oppositions: life-death, order-chaos, guilt-redemption. When

migrating to other media, these oppositions are not annulled, but rather redistributed in new languages. In an animated short film, the light of a fire can represent the historical consciousness of a community; in a video game, the appearance of fire can be the consequence of negligent acts; in a play, it can become a metaphor for transgenerational emotional inheritance. The power of myth lies in its ability to express the same thing in multiple ways.

On a psychological level, Carl Jung (1964) proposed that the archetypes present in myths allow human beings to recognize themselves in universal structures. The wandering fire, maternal punishment, the night journey, or guilt are elements that resonate with the human psyche beyond time and format. In this way, *The Limelight can emotionally touch the reader of an illustrated book, the viewer of an experimental work, the gamer of a console or the* TikTok user . Recognizing the symbol allows each subject to internalize and reinterpret it according to their experiences.

Thus, the versatility of *La Candileja* lies not only in its narrative plasticity, but in its potential to generate symbolic identification. History continues to challenge human beings through its fundamental dilemmas: abandonment, remorse, loss of control, the transmission of legacy, the surveillance of actions. In the contemporary world, where digital narratives compete for attention, the myths that survive are not the most static, but the most mutable. And *La Candileja* , with its wandering fire and ethical charge, stands as a story capable of inhabiting multiple dimensions of modern humanity: ancestral fear, the need for justice, the search for meaning, symbolic play. Its flame continues to burn, not only on the sidewalks where its name is still whispered, but in the electrical circuits of the screens where its story is reborn, adapting and embodying the shadows that continue to inhabit the human condition.

RITUAL OR CEREMONIAL ELEMENT

Fire, Myth and Rite

The legend of *La Candileja* , rooted in the Colombian collective imagination, constitutes a symbolic representation that transcends its narrative function and positions itself as a structural figure in certain ritual practices, popular beliefs, and festive settings in rural and peri-urban communities. Its narrative form—that of a fireball that punishes those who have done wrong, especially children who disobey or mistreat their elders—presents characteristics that make it suitable for inscription in the symbolic cycle of the rite: invocation, sanction, and restoration of order. This ritual potential is intertwined with the peasant worldview, in which orality not only transmits stories or warnings, but also ethical-religious structures that contribute to social cohesion, as Mircea Eliade (1957) suggests in his analysis of the myth as an exemplary model of human behavior.

In various areas of Colombia—particularly in the departments of Tolima, Huila, Caquetá, and part of the Coffee Region— *La Candileja* has been narrated in festive or religious contexts in a performative manner, that is, with improvised theatrical resources, masks, dances, and symbolic fire games. These forms, although informal and removed from the official liturgical canon, function as pedagogical rituals where the myth becomes present, especially during celebrations such as the *Nights of the Dead* , rural patron saint festivals, or oral storytelling events. As Victor Turner (1969) analyzes, on these occasions the mythic stories are

embodied in rites of passage or in liminal spaces where the community, gathered, reaffirms its values, fears, and hopes through the shared symbol.

However, *La Candileja* is not an express part of institutionalized religious celebrations, such as Catholic masses or formal liturgical rites. Its place is found in a syncretic popular religiosity, where saints, prayers, legends, and archetypal figures coexist. This religiosity, which Michel de Certeau (1984) considers a form of symbolic resistance by communities to official discourse, turns La Candileja into a marginalized, sacred symbol. In many villages, for example, prayers or symbolic acts are performed in the belief that its appearance is due to moral imbalances in the home or in the treatment of the elderly, thus forming part of a collective restorative practice, a sort of uncodified domestic ritual.

Evening storytelling can also be seen as rituals in that they reconfigure everyday space-time. The evocation of the myth in the darkness, accompanied by candlelight or bonfires, creates an environment conducive to the symbolic repetition of the story, as is done in certain initiation rites. In such contexts, fear is not a dysfunctional emotion, but rather a vector of moral learning, as Joseph Campbell (1949) indicates when he explains that myth teaches through images and emotions. In this sense, the ritual appearance of *La Candileja* in nighttime storytelling not only discourages misconduct but also reinforces the role of elders as guardians of the social order.

In some towns in southern Colombia, during celebrations honoring the dead or during rituals to "cleanse the territory," *La Candileja* appears as an antagonistic symbolic figure: lights or bonfires are placed to "ward off evil," stories are told as a form of "narrative exorcism," or even its appearances are interpreted as signs that a community has violated certain traditional norms. These practices directly link the myth with

forms of preventive or protective ritual, inserting it into a framework of spirituality that, while not institutional, has concrete effects on the communities' social and moral practices.

In current contexts, the ritual presence of *La Candileja* has found new forms of expression that engage with the symbolic, the cultural, and the artistic. In mid-sized cities such as Ibagué, Neiva, and Manizales, representations of the legend have been integrated into carnivals, school plays, folk dances, and myth and legend contests, especially on dates like Halloween or in departmental cultural celebrations. In such cases, the ritual takes on a performative and educational dimension: children and young people embody the character, representing him in theatrical acts that reaffirm not only collective memory but also the presence of the myth in living culture. As Clifford Geertz (1973) points out, culture is a system of shared symbols where rites and performances function as "social texts" that communicate, educate, and unite.

From a contemporary perspective, even in digital media, the symbolic use of *La Candileja* can be analyzed as a virtual or narrative ritual. On social media platforms, its image is shared, animated stories are recreated, or elements of its legend are integrated into memes and viral videos. Although these uses seem superficial, they contain ritual dimensions specific to the digital age, as they form transient symbolic communities around shared themes. Pierre Lévy (1997) suggests that the virtual does not eliminate the symbolic, but rather reconfigures it. In this environment, the myth becomes an interface connecting the ancestral and the contemporary, the rural and the urban, and the narrated and the enacted.

The myth of *La Candileja* , then, is not limited to a moralizing tale: it has been, and continues to be, part of a ceremonial framework that operates at different levels of intensity, form, and temporality. By evoking it, the

community activates symbolic structures of vigilance, sanction, and moral restitution. In a context where traditional rituals are fading, the permanence of myths like this one offers an identity and emotional anchor that allows us to rebuild our relationship with memory, with the collective body, and with fundamental values.

Today, its ritual use has diversified and adapted, extending beyond rural areas and finding new forms of symbolic presence in educational, cultural, and digital environments. This demonstrates not only the persistence of the myth, but also its capacity to act as a catalyst for meaning in a fragmented society that continues to search for ethical, cultural, and emotional referents. In *La Candileja* , fire not only remains: it illuminates memory, purifies behavior, connects the living with the dead, and allows communities to speak, act, and remember collectively. Its ceremonial function, then, remains active as a symbolic device that transits between the sacred and the profane, between the oral past and the connected present, constantly reconfiguring the invisible ties that sustain Colombian popular culture.

Symbols that purify

The legend of *La Candileja* , within the Colombian popular imagination, has held a function that goes beyond the narrative or moralizing: it has been articulated as an element of symbolic mediation with the transcendent, embodying a force that allows for the ordering, sanctioning, and purification of certain social realities. In particular, its figure—an incandescent sphere of fire that pursues and punishes those who dishonor their elders—has been interpreted in certain contexts as a punitive manifestation of moral and familial imbalance. Such interpretation has allowed its inclusion in non-institutional ritual forms, but deeply rooted in the community ethos of many regions of the country.

From the perspective of mythological anthropology, the ritual function of *La Candileja* can be linked to what Eliade (1957) called "sense-makers": symbolic structures that mediate between chaos and order, error and repair, and that are actualized at key moments of transition or imbalance. In many rural areas of Tolima, Huila, and Caquetá, this legend has been evoked as a warning and also as an invocation during rites of passage—such as the transition from childhood to adolescence—where adults turn to the image of *La Candileja* as a pedagogical and corrective tool to teach respect, obedience, and family protection. This figure, then, fulfills a ritual function in that it regulates the symbolic transition between states of psychosocial maturity.

Rites of passage, according to Van Gennep (1909), consist of three phases: separation, transition, and incorporation. In the stories in which *La Limelight* appears to punish disobedient youth, these three phases are evident: the young person separates from family values (rupture), is symbolically pursued by fire (liminality), and eventually finds his or her place through moral correction (reincorporation). Although these are not formal or institutionalized rituals, this relationship functions as a symbolic device that structures the moral growth of individuals, who become aware of their actions and consequences.

On the other hand, *La Candileja* has also been symbolically invoked in processes of collective healing and purification. In communities where disobedience, disrespect for the elderly, or intra-family conflict generate persistent tensions, the practice of telling the myth has been recorded as an "exorcising" act, in the sense that its evocation mobilizes fear, reflection, and, in some cases, reconciliation. The narration of the story, with its hyperbolic and frightening components, functions as a mechanism of collective catharsis, where the internal males of the family or community group are confronted and symbolically expelled.

According to Turner (1969), in social rituals, the narrated myth can operate as a "social drama" in which the conflict is symbolically represented and its resolution rehearsed.

In this sense, *La Candileja* acts as an archetype of supernatural justice, and her figure appears in practices that could be described as domestic purification rituals. In certain peasant families, for example, prayers, collective prayers, offerings of light (candles), or cleansing with herbs have been recorded on the nights following supposed apparitions of La Candileja, especially when these coincide with times of illness, loss, or family disorder. These actions, although lacking an official liturgy, are integrated into a popular religiosity that employs magical and symbolic elements to restore balance. As Douglas (1966) suggests, purification practices aim to reintegrate the social and moral order by controlling the impure or anomalous.

It is relevant to mention that in some modern contexts, these ritual forms have been reinterpreted within urban community spaces and in school or cultural activities. The legend of *La Candileja* is performed theatrically or included in moral education programs on holidays such as All Souls' Day or patron saint festivities. While the ritual element appears to be diluted in playful forms, it retains part of its original function: to announce the severance of family ties, promote intergenerational respect, and generate reflection on ethical behavior. The performativity of these acts has symbolic value; as Geertz (1973) indicates, rituals are "social texts" that, even in contemporary contexts, transmit deeply rooted cultural meanings.

In recent years, digital space has also been a stage for the ritualized circulation of the myth. On social media, stories, videos, and memes about *La Candileja* are shared, especially on dates related to the occult or the spiritual. Although seemingly decontextualized, these virtual

events represent forms of updating the ritual, where users invoke the character not only for entertainment but also as a moral reminder, social critique, or expression of cultural identity. Pierre Lévy (1997) argues that the virtual world can become a new ritual space, where the symbolic is redefined and connects with subjective dimensions of contemporary human beings.

Likewise, in certain alternative spirituality groups or holistic healing practices, local legends have begun to be reinterpreted as useful archetypes for internal processes. Some symbolic therapists or workshop facilitators have used figures such as *La Candileja* to illustrate dynamics of suppressed anger, self-imposed punishment, or the need for reconciliation with the maternal figure and the female ancestral line. This reinterpretation reflects the versatility of the myth and its ability to be integrated into modern discourses without losing its symbolic meaning, contributing to processes of emotional and spiritual healing.

Thus, the ritual use of *La Candileja* has not been extinguished, but has transformed and diversified in response to new forms of subjectivity, spirituality, and community. Its fire is not only destructive: it is also purifying, revealing, and initiatory. In the legend, what remains is not only the physical body, but also deviant behaviors, moral neglect, and breaches of intergenerational respect. In its ritual dimension, *La Candileja* illuminates both the paths of fear and those of learning, both on ancestral paths and in urban classrooms, plazas, networks, and therapeutic spaces. Thus, the legend remains relevant as a dynamic symbol that accompanies, punishes, cleanses, and transforms, merging with the deep needs of the communities that invoke it.

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Fires of Collective Feeling

The legend of *La Candileja* , deeply rooted in Colombian oral tradition, is not only a moralizing tale or a cultural phenomenon transmitted intergenerationally, but also embodies a set of complex emotions that operate on multiple levels of the individual and collective psyche. Its representation as an incandescent ball of fire that appears at night, punishing the disrespectful or disobedient, constitutes a narrative device that activates primary and secondary emotions in a dynamic of symbolic interaction between fear, guilt, respect, and nostalgia. In this sense, the legend transcends its folkloric dimension to operate as an emotional structure that influences the formation of subjectivities within rural and urban communities.

From a psychological perspective, it is possible to interpret *The Limelight* through the model of basic emotions proposed by Robert Plutchik (1980), who identifies eight primary emotions—joy, sadness, fear, trust, surprise, aversion, anger, and anticipation—arranged in an emotional wheel that allows us to understand combinations, intensities, and affective transformations. In this model, fear is one of the central emotions, and it is not limited to a negative reaction, but fulfills fundamental adaptive functions, such as protection against danger or the reinforcement of behavioral limits. Thus, *The Limelight* , by provoking fear through its terrifying appearance and its punitive function, generates an emotional response that helps shape the moral behavior of children, young people, and adults.

This fear, however, is not an unstructured or pathological fear, but rather a regulatory one. According to Tomkins (1962), negative emotions—such as fear—have pedagogical value in building character and morality, especially in contexts where access to formal educational structures is limited. In rural areas of Colombia, *La Candileja* has served as a figure of emotional containment, invoked to warn about the consequences of acts considered disrespectful, selfish, or violent, particularly toward elders. The emotion it arouses is not only individual in nature but collective: it functions as a social affect (Ahmed, 2004), in which the community sees itself reflected in its shared fear, reaffirming common values.

On the other hand, respect also emerges as a secondary emotion associated with *La Candileja* . Although this character is feared, he is not merely hated. He represents a sanctioning figure, yes, but also a living memory of community justice. In many stories, his maternal origins and her condemnation for having overindulged his grandchildren, allowing their moral corruption, are highlighted. This turns *La Candileja* into a generational warning, but also into a mirror that reflects the affective tensions between love, authority, guilt, and redemption. Such ambivalence generates a mixture of reverential fear and empathy, a complex emotional configuration that—according to Plutchik —can lead to tertiary emotions such as submission or contemplation.

This configuration is enhanced by the way the legend is told: in nocturnal, familiar, intimate spaces, where gestures, pauses, and vocal inflections intensify the emotional effect of the relationship. Barthes (1977) suggests that the myth operates as a second-order semiotic system, laden with affective connotations that escape the purely rational. In this sense, the narrative of *La Candileja* becomes an intergenerational emotional channel, where ways of feeling and

understanding community life, death, punishment, and legacy are reproduced.

The emotional role of this legend becomes even more evident when exploring first-person oral accounts, where those who have "seen" or "felt" *La Candileja* not only narrate the event with fear, but with a kind of nostalgia. This nostalgia refers not only to a safer time in the past, but to an emotional memory of contact with mystery, with the sacred, or with the unknowable. Boym (2001) asserts that cultural nostalgia arises when past forms of emotional and social organization are idealized, and in this sense, *La Candileja* acts as a figure that evokes a time in which respect, family unity, and popular faith marked the course of life.

At the same time, it is important to examine the cathartic function this figure plays in some therapeutic contexts or in the symbolic reconstruction of trauma. In community reconciliation spaces, especially in areas marked by armed conflict, the evocation of traditional stories such as that of *La Candileja* has been used as an emotional resource to explore feelings of guilt, fear, loss, and memory. Jung (1964) identified the archetypes of the collective unconscious as tools for accessing the deep self; in this context, *La Candileja* represents the internal fire that purifies but also burns, that guides but also punishes, thus generating an emotional dynamic of self-exploration.

Furthermore, in educational and artistic contexts, this legend has been used to raise emotional awareness among students and young people. Its theatrical or literary representation allows us to analyze fear and other emotions not as simple responses, but as forms of knowledge, as argued by Martha Nussbaum (2001), who sees emotions as vehicles for ethical and social understanding. *The Limelight* awakens feelings that allow us to consider what is right and wrong, what is permitted and what is sanctioned, beyond the normative.

In short, the legend not only narrates, but also moves. It not only warns, but shapes the listener's inner world. In Plutchik 's perspective , the emotions evoked by *The Limelight* —fear, respect, nostalgia, guilt, admiration—do not act in isolation, but as an interrelated system that gives meaning to the experience of the myth. Its emotional impact lies precisely in its capacity to generate multiple affective resonances, allowing each subject to find in it a mirror of their own experiences, fears, and family memories.

In this way, *La Candileja* lives on not only in the words that tell it, but in the emotions that accompany it. The legend functions as an affective architecture that organizes, moves, and mobilizes, allowing entire generations to understand, through storytelling and feeling, the values that structure their community. Its fire not only ignites: it also illuminates what is felt but not always named. Exploring it through its emotional resonances reveals itself as a poetic-affective device that connects the mythical with the intimate, the symbolic with the psychological, and the communal with the profoundly human.

Fear, myth and catharsis

The legend of **La Candileja** , deeply rooted in the oral tradition of southern Colombia, especially in regions such as Huila, Tolima, and Caquetá, operates as a symbolic narrative with strong emotional and psychological implications. It is not merely a story told with moral or playful implications, but a cultural construct that channels and represents collective fears, intergenerational guilt, and communal anxieties. In this context, its function as a myth transcends the sphere of the fantastic to position itself as an emotional device that articulates mechanisms of collective catharsis and self-understanding. The legend,

like so many others in Latin American popular history, constitutes a way of narrating the ominous in a structured manner, recognizing fear but also mastering it symbolically (Eliade, 1963).

The basic story of La Candileja—a permissive grandmother whose soul, upon dying, is condemned to wander as a ball of fire for failing to correct the depraved acts of her grandchildren—responds to a precise emotional architecture, configured to activate affective responses from an early age. In his theoretical model, Robert Plutchik (1980) asserts that basic emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, and guilt have adaptive functions that help individuals and communities survive and organize. The legend, then, acts as a collective emotional system that transforms a diffuse fear —lack of control, divine punishment, the breakdown of order—into a recognizable narrative that can be shared, remembered, and retold.

From this perspective, *The Footlight* serves a cathartic function, understood as the purging or release of intense emotions through symbolic or narrative means. Aristotle (Poetics, 4th century BC) already identified catharsis as one of the objectives of tragic art: a way of experiencing emotions such as fear and compassion in a safe environment, which generates relief and understanding. This function was taken up by contemporary authors such as Joseph Campbell (1949), who saw in myths the capacity to embody the deepest human fears and provide models for confronting them symbolically. *The Footlight* , with its incandescent form, its vigilante nature, and its moralizing component, embodies this principle of the feared, the unknown, and the sacred, and allows the community to project its moral and social anxieties onto it.

The emotional dimension of this legend does not operate in the abstract. It manifests itself in bodies that tremble upon hearing it, in children who remember it with reverential terror, in communities that delimit spaces that should not be entered at night. The fear generated by *The Limelight*

is not dysfunctional; as Mary Douglas (1970) points out, the symbolic systems that generate fear serve to reinforce social structures, establish boundaries of acceptable behavior, and strengthen group cohesion. In this sense, the myth contributes to an emotional pedagogy in which negative emotions—such as night terrors or guilt—are integrated into the socialization process.

However, fear is not the only emotion activated by this mythical figure. According to Plutchik 's emotional wheel , fear can combine with other emotions to form complex states, such as remorse (fear + sadness) or submission (fear + trust). In several folk tales, *La Candileja* not only punishes those who disobey rules, but also appears to those who have forgotten their ancestors or broken ties with their community. This gives it a broader emotional dimension: it is not only a threat, but also a call to order, an affective reminder of moral duty and respect for tradition. As Sara Ahmed (2014) suggests, emotions are not private states, but forms of relationship that circulate socially and produce effects in the configuration of the collective. *La Candileja* , therefore, functions as social affect, a symbolic node where shared emotions intersect.

In situations of sociopolitical violence, forced displacement, or cultural loss, this legend also acquires a distinct emotional power. In many communities that have experienced war, the fear of *La Candileja* is intertwined with real fears of armed actors, spirits, or spiritual punishments. However, its retelling can also provide a way to reorganize trauma, externalize it, and give it meaning. Cathy Caruth (1996), in her studies on trauma and narrative, points out that mythical stories can offer symbolic structures for understanding the incomprehensible, thus enabling processes of mourning or reparation. In this context, *La Candileja* can operate as a useful symbol in psychosocial work and community memory processes.

Likewise, in the narrative of *The Limelight* , fire represents a highly symbolic element. Fire is destruction, but also purification; it is punishment, but also renewal. This ambivalence resonates emotionally in those who hear it: the fire in the Limelight terrifies, but also fascinates. This duality generates what Freud (1919) calls "the uncanny" (Das Unheimliche): that which is both strange and familiar, the known that becomes threatening. This particular emotion reinforces the connection with the myth, generating a liminal experience that allows the subject to explore psychic boundaries without crossing them.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the emotional narrative of this legend is not frozen in the past. Its symbolic power remains relevant and adapts to new forms of expression: school dramatizations, short films, young adult literature, social media, and even narrative therapy. In these new formats, its emotional impact remains, even if it may be reconfigured. This demonstrates that the myth—and particularly its emotional dimension—is not static, but evolves alongside collective sensibilities, taking on new meaning as social emotions change in form, but not in substance.

The legend of *La Candileja* remains alight not only because of the fire it represents, but also because of the emotional warmth it mobilizes. Its power lies not only in its capacity to instill fear, but in its ability to channel, name, and redefine shared fears. It acts as a symbolic matrix that transforms fear into meaning, guilt into warning, loss into memory, and punishment into emotional pedagogy. In Plutchik 's model , the emotional system is organized as a dynamic circle of intensities and transformations: this myth also acts in this way, constantly rotating between generations, adapting to the emotional thresholds of each era, reminding the listener that fear is not only human, but also necessary for building community, empathy, and moral conscience.

ECONOMIC AND TOURISM POTENTIAL

Myth, Tourism and Market

The legend of *La Candileja* , rooted in the oral folklore of Colombia, especially in the departments of Huila, Tolima, and Caquetá, represents not only a traditional narrative with symbolic value, but also a resource with significant potential for cultural and heritage tourism. As communities seek to revalue their intangible heritage, the myth emerges as an instrument of tourist attraction, identity reconstruction, and economic revitalization. This transition from orality to the cultural market is not a neutral process: it involves a reconfiguration of meanings, a symbolic dispute for authenticity, and an insertion into broader dynamics of accumulation of symbolic and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

In its broadest definition, cultural tourism encompasses travel practices motivated by an interest in the tangible and intangible heritage of a territory, including oral expressions, customs, rituals, beliefs, and legends (Richards, 1996). In this context, legends such as *La Candileja* offer a valuable resource, both for their ability to represent local imaginaries and for their narrative flexibility. The figure of a grandmother condemned to wander like an incandescent fire due to her moral negligence is transformed, through the lens of tourism, into a story that combines the exotic, the ancestral, and the fantastic. This potential is capitalized on by festivals, museums, thematic routes, and cultural products that incorporate this relationship into their offerings.

Various experiences in southern Colombia show a growing use of myth as a tourist attraction. Local festivals, such as patron saint celebrations in some municipalities of Huila, have begun to include theatrical performances of *La Candileja* , symbolic processions, and educational activities for children and tourists. In other areas, guided night tours have been designed where legends are narrated in rural or natural settings, reinforcing the link between territory, memory, and sensory experience. According to Urry (2002), postmodern tourism is characterized by the search for the authentic and the emotional, where the consumer no longer only wants to see, but also to feel, connect, and imagine. In this sense, *La Candileja* meets these criteria, being a myth charged with emotional tension, symbolism, and a connection to rurality.

This process of symbolic conversion of a legend into an economic resource is part of what García Canclini (1999) calls "cultural hybridization," a phenomenon where the traditional and the modern intertwine in configurations that respond both to market logic and the need for identity reaffirmation. However, this hybridization is not without tensions. The commodification of culture can lead to the trivialization of myth, stripping it of its symbolic power or decontextualizing it from its community roots. At this point, it is essential to recall the contributions of Walter Benjamin (1936), who warned about the loss of the "aura" of cultural works in contexts of technical reproduction and mass consumption. The challenge is to transform myth into a product without diluting its original power.

The tourist exploitation of *La Candileja* also opens the door to the creation of community cultural capital. When communities themselves design, manage, and control tourism narratives, not only is local economic development promoted, but the social fabric is strengthened. Community-based tourism initiatives based on myths generate

employment, preserve the original narrative, and foster heritage education processes. As Chambers (2000) points out, well-managed cultural tourism can become a strategy that stands out against global homogenization by allowing communities to define what to show and how to tell their story.

In this context, myth becomes a unit of symbolic value with the potential to be converted into economic value, provided its internal codes and sacred or pedagogical dimension are respected. In the words of Pierre Bourdieu (1996), the circulation of symbolic capital—in this case, myth—can be translated into economic capital when it is institutionalized and legitimized in certain fields, such as tourism, education, or culture. This translation entails the transition from marginalized narrative to authorized discourse, from rumor to cultural itinerary, from childish fear to heritage spectacle.

The figure of *La Candileja* can also be integrated into broader community museography projects, immersive experiences, or digital narratives. Today, augmented reality projects, tourism apps, and transmedia content can revitalize myths like this one and adapt them to contemporary audiences without losing their essence. As Jenkins (2006) points out, transmedia narrative doesn't fragment history, but rather expands it, allowing for new forms of access and appropriation. A video performance, a play, or a video game based on *La Candileja* can engage with its oral version without replacing it, thus broadening its audience and impact.

However, this economic exploitation also requires clear cultural policies that prevent the misappropriation of heritage and promote active community participation. As UNESCO (2003) points out, the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage must involve the communities that bear it, recognizing their right to define the meaning, use, and projection of their

cultural expressions. In this sense, the tourist use of *La Candileja* must be framed within participatory processes that guarantee both its economic viability and its symbolic authenticity.

Thus, the myth ceases to be merely a childhood memory or a moral warning to become a tool for development, a driving force for territorial narratives, an excuse for encounter and creativity. This process does not imply betraying its original meaning, but rather expanding it, redefining it, and connecting it with new sensibilities. In a country marked by social fragmentation and territorial neglect, myths like *La Candileja* can be emotional, cultural, and economic anchors , capable of uniting community, memory, and aesthetic experience in a single shared narrative.

La Candileja illuminates more than the rural roads of southern Colombia: when incorporated into cultural tourism and local development strategies, it projects a symbolic fire capable of activating creative economies, memory practices, and community ties. The myth, when commodified with care and respect, becomes a resource that not only generates income but also strengthens identities, sensibilities, and a sense of belonging. Its flame, far from being extinguished by contact with the market, can be rekindled if we understand that cultural capital is not an obstacle to economic development, but its most powerful substance when nourished by the collective, the narrated, and the lived.

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authorized discourse, from rumor to cultural itinerary, from childish fear to heritage spectacle.

The figure of *La Candileja* can also be integrated into broader community museography projects, immersive experiences, or digital narratives. Today, augmented reality projects, tourism apps, and transmedia content can revitalize myths like this one and adapt them to contemporary audiences without losing their essence. As Jenkins (2006) points out, transmedia narrative doesn't fragment history, but rather expands it, allowing for new forms of access and appropriation. A video performance, a play, or a video game based on *La Candileja* can engage with its oral version without replacing it, thus broadening its audience and impact.

However, this economic exploitation also requires clear cultural policies that prevent the misappropriation of heritage and promote active community participation. As UNESCO (2003) points out, the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage must involve the communities that bear it, recognizing their right to define the meaning, use, and projection of their cultural expressions. In this sense, the tourist use of *La Candileja* must be framed within participatory processes that guarantee both its economic viability and its symbolic authenticity.

Thus, the myth ceases to be merely a childhood memory or a moral warning to become a tool for development, a driving force for territorial narratives, an excuse for encounter and creativity. This process does not imply betraying its original meaning, but rather expanding it, redefining it, and connecting it with new sensibilities. In a country marked by social fragmentation and territorial neglect, myths like *La Candileja* can be emotional, cultural, and economic anchors, capable of uniting community, memory, and aesthetic experience in a single shared narrative.

La Candileja illuminates more than the rural roads of southern Colombia: when incorporated into cultural tourism and local development strategies, it projects a symbolic fire capable of activating creative economies, memory practices, and community ties. The myth, when commodified with care and respect, becomes a resource that not only generates income but also strengthens identities, sensibilities, and a sense of belonging. Its flame, far from being extinguished by contact with the market, can be rekindled if we understand that cultural capital is not an obstacle to economic development, but its most powerful substance when nourished by the collective, the narrated, and the lived.

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FRANCISCO FABIANY MOLINA BUSTOS
MASTER'S DEGREE IN TERRITORY, CONFLICT AND CULTURE

Master's degree with training in enculturation for the execution of competencies in the formulation and evaluation of projects of various types and levels of complexity, in the pursuit of economic and financial efficiency. A person with integrity and commitment to the socioeconomic and environmental development of the region, he or she is supportive, open-minded, respectful, and tolerant of the ideas of others within a framework of coexistence and civic culture.